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**THE PRIESTLY SPIRITUALITY**  
**IN CHOE YANG EOP THOMAS**

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## INTRODUCTION

In August, 2014, Pope Francis made a historic pastoral visit to South Korea. This journey was his first trip to Asia in his life and also since his election as the Bishop of Rome.<sup>1</sup> Aside from attending the Asian Youth Day, he also presided over the beatification of 124 Koreans. Once again the Holy Father presented the Korean Church as being built upon the foundation of countless servants of God, especially martyrs who had persevered in times of severe persecutions.

Koreans really respect and honor especially the servant of God, Choe Yang-Eop Thomas, who served the poor faithful of Joseon as an ordained catholic priest. He overcame tremendous difficulties and kept his faith during times of hardship and persecution. He is considered as the example and model for Korean clergy and lay people. Without any doubt he made a great impact on the life of the Korean church and the Christians. His holiness of life and priestly virtues can even contribute greatly today. The researcher is convinced that Cheo Thomas is a model for the Korean Christian but even for the universal church as an outstanding priest and missionary.

In addition it should be noted that Choe Thomas lived and studied in Macau during the 19<sup>th</sup> century at the *Société des Missions Etrangères de Paris*<sup>2</sup> (in English “The Society of Foreign Missions of Paris”, hereafter it will be referred to as MEP) Procuration House. Many Christians of Korea reflect about him and how difficult his life was back then and how he was able to overcome all challenges as a poor seminarian and missionary in Macau. He had to adapt and live in Macau with the

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<sup>1</sup> The Preparatory Committee for the Visitation of the Holy Father, *Arise and Shine*, (Kor) (Seoul: Catholic Press, 2014), 4-6.

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia, “The Society of Foreign Missions of Paris” see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris\\_Foreign\\_Missions\\_Society](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris_Foreign_Missions_Society), accessed on December 11, 2015.

unacquainted culture, language, etc. He endured all hardships thanks to his excellent spirituality. Thus he became a source of strength and power for the researcher, a poor seminarian in Macau. This is why, though there are outstanding spiritual traditions of the Order of Preachers, the researcher feels obliged to look at him who had preceded in faith and the life of glory, and then would like to follow and imitate the path of holiness of his life as one preparing for the priesthood in Macau like him.

Therefore the researcher is going to reflect in this investigation on the theological foundation of spirituality in the first chapter, and on a Korean model of a priestly life of Fr. Choe Yang Eop Thomas in the second chapter. In the third chapter some specific aspects of his priestly spirituality will be the main focus. We shall begin this journey by following his holy steps.

All biblical passage in this paper shall be taken from the *New Revised Standard Version* of the Holy Bible. All second Vatican documents are taken from the edition of Austin Flannery, Vol I. New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1998.

In the Letters of Choe Thomas' Professors and Companion Clergy, AME refers to the Archives de la Societe des Missions Etrangeres de Paris, and APF refers to the *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* and HB (the author could not find the English meaning of the abbreviation HB, but in Korean it refers to the material collected in the Vatican on faithful who are in the process of beatification) and for my research, I used the Korean translation of these letters.

Most original documents used in the second and third chapter are in Korean because there is no English version available. Thus the researcher made the attempt to translate the relevant passages into English. In a foot note, the word "kor" refers to the Korean document. The complete bibliographical information of the original sources in Korean can be found in the bibliography.

# CHAPTER ONE

## THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SPIRITUALITY

### A. Spirituality in General

The word *spirituality* derives from the Latin word *spiritualitas*. This word is related to the Latin adjective *spirit(u)alis* ‘spiritual’ which the Vulgate uses to translate St. Paul’s adjective **πνευματικός** (1Cor 15:44). This word is used by St. Paul in opposition to both fleshly (Greek **σαρκικός** Latin *carnalis*, Romans 7:14) and unspiritual (Greek **ψυχικός**, Latin *animalis*, 1Cor 2:14-15). Spirituality in Paul means that the whole human being is affected by the Spirit of God (Greek **πνευ α** **Θ υ** Latin *Spiritus Dei*, 1Cor 2:12, 14)<sup>4</sup> and it became “technical term for Christian existence.”<sup>5</sup>

Being spiritual means being and living in God’s presence. We may define spirituality as the affirmation of life being in harmonious relationship with God, the self, the community and the environment in such a way that it nurtures and celebrates wholeness.

In terms of terminology, nowadays theologians generally speak simply of spirituality and spiritual theology. Earlier names used for spiritual life are devout life, supernatural life, interior life, ascetical and mystical evolution and theology of

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<sup>3</sup> The word “**ψυχικός**” has many meanings: animal, worldly, material, living creature, and animate.

<sup>4</sup> Walter H. Principe, “Spirituality, Christian,” *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Order of St. Benedict, 1993): 931-938, esp. 931.

<sup>5</sup> Josef Sudbrack, “Spirituality,” *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, Vol. 6, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970): 147-153, esp. 148.

Christian perfection. Before Vatican II, spiritual theology was called, in particular, ascetical and mystical theology.

The word ascetical comes from the Greek verb ἀσκέω which means “practice” or “exercise” to acquire a skill, particularly an athletic skill. This meaning was expanded and applied to the study of philosophy and the practice of virtues. In the early church, the faithful, who observed the vow of chastity and practiced the monastic life, were called ascetics.<sup>6</sup>

The word Mystical comes from the Greek μυστικός which means “secret or hidden rites.” The noun μυστήριον can be found in the Sacred Scriptures. The first example occurs in the Old Testament, more specifically in the Book of Daniel and in the Deutero-canonical books.<sup>7</sup> The second biblical occurrence to mention is in the New Testament, where the word is used to describe the experience of the breaking in of God’s rule in the words and works of Jesus Christ for our salvation (Mark 4:11).<sup>8</sup> In the letters of the Apostle Paul, “mystery” is used to refer to “God’s saving activity towards Israel...All Israel will be saved at the Parousia, after the acceptance of the Gentiles.”<sup>9</sup> In 1 Cor 2:1 Paul calls his proclamation of the crucified Christ as the “mystery of God”. This saving event is “inaccessible to human reason because it appears to the reason to be foolishness (1:23-31).”<sup>10</sup>

In modern times, ascetical and mystical theology merged into a new expression: theology of Christian perfection. This name underlines that all Christians,

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Jordan Aumann, *Spiritual Theology* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 1998), 13-14.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 15

<sup>8</sup> H. Krämer, μυστήριον *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 2, eds. Horst Balz & Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991): 446-449, esp. 447.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 448. See Romans 11:25ff.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

by the fact of being baptized, are called to attain perfection. Finally, the term spiritual theology was used to include ascetical and mystical theology and the theology of Christian perfection.<sup>11</sup>

Nowadays many people are interested in spirituality, even atheists and non-believers. There are various spiritual movements today. Normally there are two representative characteristics of spirituality. The first characteristic refers to a knowledge of the levels of reality not directly derived from the senses. Spirituality leads people to a deeper awareness of their inner self and of the transcendental dimension and meaning of life and the world. The second characteristic refers to issue of personal integration. Especially today, people are invaded by fragmentation and depersonalization. But life is wholistic and so is spirituality. A healthy form of spirituality helps people to regain wholeness and integrity.<sup>12</sup>

Every religion and even worldview conveys its own form of spirituality. Thus, one may speak of Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim and Christian spirituality. Generally, religion tries to connect human behavior with the spiritual life. People know that the actions of human beings are very important and that they have a relationship in society with the spiritual dimension of life. Common spiritual elements and practices can be found and even certain harmony between Christianity and the other religions can be made.<sup>13</sup> Now I am going to write about Christian spirituality.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 16.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Michael Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 13-15.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 17.

## B. Christian Spirituality

“All men are called to belong to the new people of God. This people therefore, whilst remaining one and only one, are to be spread throughout the whole world and to all ages in order that the design of God’s will may be fulfilled.”<sup>14</sup> The Church proclaims that everything in the world is in God. People think that they might be different when their faith is different. And they sometimes act against each other. This is really wrong, for everything in the world is the Lord’s (cf. Psalm 24:1). They should live together and cooperate with each other. This is God’s will for them and it is also one goal of Christian spirituality, to live together harmoniously and justly before God to reach heaven.<sup>15</sup>

Spirituality guides all of God’s faithful to the perfection of a Christian life. Classical theology defines spiritual theology thus: “That part of theology that, proceeding from the truths of divine revelation and the religious experience of individual persons, defines the nature of the supernatural life, formulates directives for its growth and development, and explains the process by which souls advance from the beginning of the spiritual life to its full perfection.”<sup>16</sup>

Christian spirituality is a *christocentric* spirituality, meaning that it relates to follow Christ. The relationship between Jesus Christ and Christians is very important. Christian spirituality is not focused on the individual, but is fundamentally communitarian. Spirituality helps to nourish the right relationships in a community

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<sup>14</sup> Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, §13, *Second Vatican Council*, 364.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory on the Ministry and the Life of Priests*, in <http://www.clerus.va/content/clerus/en/notizie/direttorio-per-il-ministero-e-la-vita-dei-presbiteri---nuova-edi.html>, accessed on May 29, 2014 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), no. 17.

<sup>16</sup> Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 22.

centered on Christ. The Holy Spirit unveils Jesus for us and reveals the mystery of God to us.<sup>17</sup>

Christian spirituality is the source of our life in Jesus Christ. He is the mediator between the creator God and humankind; the perfect revealer of the Father: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). As mediator, Jesus reconciles us with the Father: “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor 5:19). “For our sake he [the Father] made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation” (2 Cor 5:17). Christian spirituality involves commitment and acceptance of Jesus as personal Lord and Savior. Only when the believer is in Christ he/she becomes a new creation. To be “in Christ” means to follow his teachings as the “new lawgiver.” As Christ is the center of Christian spirituality, Christians become followers and imitators of him.

Through Christ, Christian spirituality has a *trinitarian* spirituality, because Christian spirituality is based on the mystery of the Trinity which is the summary of the Christian faith.<sup>18</sup> Christian life starts with the sacrament of baptism. After this Christians can fully share communion with God. They have become adopted children of God, who is their Father. Thus, divine filiation is a key word in Christian spirituality. Through this spiritual intimate relationship, they are going to find their ultimate identity in God.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality*, 30.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality*, 44.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory on the Ministry and the Life of Priests*, no. 17.

Christian spirituality includes also a *pneumatological* dimension, by “walking according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:4), that is biblically speaking encountering Christ, journeying to the Father, and living in the Spirit. Christian spirituality is guided or influenced by the Holy Spirit, who is given by the Father and the risen Christ in order to make people sisters and brothers of Christ and children of the Father, as well as to fashion both women and men into images of Christ (Romans 8:29, 16-17).<sup>20</sup>

Christian spirituality is also a *communal* or *ecclesial* spirituality. Christians are members of a new family, the community of brothers and sisters in faith, hope and love. This is the spirituality of the apostolic community<sup>21</sup> which is the vital element of the church. It gives the faithful a secure and lively community that practices fraternal charity and shares all possessions. Christianity was challenged by persecutions, heresies, schisms and controversies from the beginning of the church. Christians tried to overcome all these dangers within the boundary of the community and mutual fraternity.<sup>22</sup>

Christian spirituality is a deeply *liturgical* spirituality centered in authentic Christian worship. From the apostolic period onwards, there are three important rites: the rite of baptism which makes the baptized members of the church; the imposition of hands conferring the Holy Spirit, and the breaking of the bread. Among the liturgical festivities, the most important one is the celebration of the paschal

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<sup>20</sup> Principe, “Spirituality, Christian,” 932. As the apostle Paul reminds us, “a Christian life is a ‘spiritual life’, which is a life enlivened and led by the spirit towards holiness or the perfection of charity.” Cf. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (Pasay: Paulines, 1996), no. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Fausto B. Gomez, “Unpublished Lecture notes for LCS505-Theology, Spirituality and the Moral Life,” The University of the Saint Joseph, Macau (May 2014), 2.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Jordan Aumann, *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition* (San Francisco: Sheed & Ward, 1985), 28-29.

mystery.<sup>23</sup> Thus the liturgy marks not merely a number of rituals, ceremonies, and festivities, but the actuation and continuation of the priestly work of Christ through significant and efficacious sacred signs.<sup>24</sup>

Christian spirituality leads ultimately to the participation in Christ's mystery which is his death and resurrection. It is very difficult for humans to grasp the notion of mystery due to its hidden and transcendental nature. The Second Vatican Council affirms that the Holy Spirit, who made us a part in the paschal mystery and configured us to the death of Christ, will go forward and will strengthen us in the hope of the resurrection.<sup>25</sup>

Christians try and continue to understand and follow the way of the Christ with faith in order to approach the state of perfection which is the ultimate goal of Christian spirituality.<sup>26</sup> How do they experience the presence of Christ? They can experience it in the liturgical context of the Eucharist, in prayer and in the word of God by faith and the Holy Spirit.<sup>27</sup> In this world, laity live the spiritual and divine life in Jesus Christ. And they experience Jesus Christ and share the mystery of communion in their daily life. For example the saints show how Christ's mystery become part of their life and how he lives on in his believers. By following Christ closely they come to know him deeper and better.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 27-29.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Gomez, "Unpublished Lecture notes for LCS505," 2.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, §22, *Second Vatican Council*, 922-924.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 17-18.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Aumann, *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition*, 23.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 17-18.

There are four dimensions of spirituality. The first meaning refers to spirituality as a fundamental factor, reality of a human being. The second stage is the experience of another, others and god's presence, or of human integration through self-transcendence. The third stage is the formulation of that insight through theological writings; people try to express what they experience in a variety of ways: in songs, stories, painting, liturgy, and popular devotions. The final stage is a scholarly discipline: the systematic study of the materials related to the experience of unity with God and the Holy Spirit. For Christians, the third and fourth stages are very relevant.<sup>29</sup>

Christian spirituality is for all believers in Christ and “draws its vitality from the salvific deed of God in Jesus Christ present in the church.”<sup>30</sup> It inspires “that a man is wholly himself, his own to possess – and therefore action, deed, achievement; and also that he is just as much a gift of God – and therefore contemplation, passivity, and searching. In the actual spiritual life, however, this contrast, which in the last analysis is also at the basis of ‘asceticism and mysticism’, is eliminated in the personal encounter with God.”<sup>31</sup>

For Christians who are Catholics, in particular, there are basically three forms of specific Christian spirituality which correspond to the three kinds of Christians: the priestly spirituality, the spirituality of consecrated men and women living according to the evangelical counsels, and the spirituality of the lay faithful. The concern in this paper is the priestly spirituality, which is the next theme in this investigation.

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality*, 42-43.

<sup>30</sup> Sudbrack, “Spirituality,” 150.

<sup>31</sup> Sudbrack, “Spirituality,” 152.

### C. Priestly Spirituality

Christ the Savior is the High Priest of the New Law and his priesthood remains forever and ever.<sup>32</sup> He was prophesied by the prophets and is the perfection of the priesthood. He is the successor in the order of Melchisedech. He becomes an exemplar for all priests as the eternal High Priest.<sup>33</sup>

One important mission is that Christ as the sole mediator between God and humankind has shown and shared with us the divinity of the Godhead. The second mission is that He offers to God through prayers and ultimately his sacrifice on the cross the perfect obedience as a man. Jesus can fulfill all these works because He is fully human and fully divine and he has received the fullness of grace from the Holy Spirit. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection has shown God's eternal love for humankind.<sup>34</sup>

All priests received the special character to be united themselves with Christ, the eternal High Priest. They exercise their ministry in the person of Christ and pattern their lives after Christ. Hence, priests (including every Christian) ought to be holy "for I am holy" (1 Pet 1:16).

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Priest in Union with Christ*, trans. G. W. Shelton (Rockford: Tan Books and Publishers, 2002), 3.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Wilhelm Stockums D. D., *The Priesthood*, trans. Joseph W. Grundner (Rockford: Tan Books and Publishers, 1974), 5.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Priest in Union with Christ*, 3

## 1. The Priestly Identify

St. Thomas said that Christ is the fountain of all priesthood.<sup>35</sup> The priest must be an *alter Christus* and must act *in persona Christi*.<sup>36</sup> This sentence expresses the importance of priests who need to communicate closely with Christ. They should have an intimate relationship with Christ and imitate him in their lives. This is the highest mystical experience which is Christ's whole life especially his sacrifice and his messianic vocation. Through their priestly ministry, priests continue to witness Christ to the whole world by their imitation of the Eternal High Priest in words and deeds. Moreover, Christ will act through those who exercise his priesthood.<sup>37</sup>

The mission of priests is to devote their lives to others<sup>38</sup>, especially the poor and the needy. Through the sacraments of baptism and holy orders, they are consecrated to God which means that they are God's property through the Holy Spirit. This means that they do not live for their own perfection but live in Christ for the service of others. By doing God's will, they are finding their true identity and will fulfill their mission in the priestly ministry. They are like Christ fundamentally and profoundly.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *St. Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologica*, trans. The Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Christian Classics, 1981), III, q.22, a.4.

<sup>36</sup> *Alter Christus* translates literally as "another Christ". It means that priests try to follow and resemble Christ, "to be Christ like", and not identically another Christ. Moreover everybody can and should try to be like Christ, an *alter Christus*. *In persona Christi* is a Latin phrase meaning "in the person of Christ." Only when the priest acts in the sacraments, he acts *in persona Christi*. Furthermore, priests ought to live their lives as ordinary people. Cf. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Manila: Word & Life Publications, 1994), no. 1548, hereafter it will be referred to as *CCC*; see also Felicísimo Martínez Díaz, "Unpublished Lecture notes for LCS403-Christology," The University of Saint Joseph, Macau (March 2014), 1.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Stockums, *The Priesthood*, 20-22.

<sup>38</sup> Ernst Niermann, "Priest," *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, Vol. 5, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: Herder and Herder New York, 1970): 97-101, esp 101.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. John Saward, *A Priest Forever: Continuity in an Age of Change* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2011), 5-6.

Men are consecrated priests through the sacrament of holy orders by the imposition of hands and the consecratory prayer of the Bishop. The ordained ministers participate in the Priesthood of Christ and receive a spiritual authority through the Holy Spirit. They are faithful imitators of Christ the High Priest and act *in persona Christi* in sacraments. In this time, priests serve the people of God as a Christ. On the other hand, priests are ordinary, sinful human persons. It is the Holy Spirit who transforms their weak and fragile beings into transcendental, spiritual beings through grace.<sup>40</sup>

Priests, through the sacrament of holy orders, represent Christ Jesus who is present in his Church as Head of his Body, Shepherd of his flock, and High Priest. The ministerial priest serves and forms the lay faithful who by virtue of the sacrament of baptism have become members of the common priesthood<sup>41</sup> and offers them the prayers of the church and the eucharistic sacrifice in the name of the whole Church.

Another meaning of the ministerial priesthood is the following: Christ continues to build up his church through priests.<sup>42</sup> Priests share their priesthood with their bishops who consecrated them and carry out sacred ministries with the grace of the Holy Spirit. As St. Thomas Aquinas says and as quoted by the CCC, “only Christ

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory on the Ministry and the Life of Priests*, no. 2.

<sup>41</sup> There is the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood. The faithful receive Christ’s mission as priests, prophets and kings through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation which consecrate them by the power of the Holy Spirit. And they participate by offering spiritual sacrifices and witnessing Christ by proclaiming in words and deeds his perfection. To be able to fulfill their unique vocation, the lay faithful try to have a strong spiritual life by persevering in prayer, taking part in the Eucharist and praising God. Like priests and consecrated men and women, they are called to holiness and to bear witness to Christ and hope of an eternal life. Cf. CCC, no. 1546-1547; Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, §10, *Second Vatican Council*, 360-361.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. CCC, no. 1548, 1552, 1547.

is the true priest, the others being only his ministers.”<sup>43</sup> Christ is the source of power of the priesthood because he has the chief ministerial power of institution of the sacraments and priesthood.<sup>44</sup>

“Priests shall be clothed with holiness.”<sup>45</sup> The sacramental grace makes an ordained priest holy through his ordination. Through grace, two factors will arise. The first is a model reality which is the manner of holiness, which is essentially necessary to fulfill their ministry. This holiness is rooted in sanctifying Grace and exercised in charity. The holiness may continue to grow through the whole life of a priest. The second is the indelible character which helps a priest to perform his priestly duties. Through this, the priests’ spiritual action is valid.

The sacramental grace sanctifies and elevates the action of priests. For example, when the priests celebrate mass, those who follow this reality will acquire holiness by themselves first, and then the faithful also will be influenced by these spiritual gifts. These precious gifts need to be cultivated and they continue to increase through their practice. Through their generosity and faithfulness, priests devote their life to their vocation. Their holy life profits also others.<sup>46</sup>

Let me now introduce a saint who is the patron saint of all priests, Jean-Marie-Baptiste Vianney. He was ordained by Bishop Claude Simon of Grenoble two days before the feast of the Assumption. Many people exalt him as an *Alter Christus* and a

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<sup>43</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Hebrews* (8, 4) as cited in CCC, no. 1545; see also Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, §5, *Second Vatican Council*, 870-872.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Priest in Union with Christ*, 9-10.

<sup>45</sup> *The Divine Office*, Vol III (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 345.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Priest in Union with Christ*, 133.

holy person. He offered Mass daily like a divine lamb.<sup>47</sup> He became very famous as a confessor and directing souls and lived a great ascetic life in the parish of Ars, a remote French hamlet. He was a wonderworker with a childlike simplicity. His life was filled with prayer' works of charity and compassion. He died on August 4, 1859, and was canonized on May 31, 1925.<sup>48</sup>

What is the purpose of being a priest? Jesus said: "Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them.....and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:19-20); "go into all the world and proclaim the Good news (Mark 16:15)"

## 2. The Ministry of the Priesthood

Saint John Paul II writes in his encyclical letter *Pastores Dabo Vobis* that priests are a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ who is the Head and Shepherd of the Church. They receive a special authority from Christ; this is their priestly identity. For this they should proclaim the truth to his flock and administer all the sacraments to show the love of Jesus in the community for the salvation of all. The priests will unite the flock with Christ and will lead it to the Father through Christ and in the Spirit.<sup>49</sup>

Evangelization is a primary pastoral task for all Christianity. This commandment applies especially to the priest who is fully united with the mystery of Christ. "All priests must have the mind and the heart of missionaries – open to the

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Seward, *A Priest Forever*, 3-4.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Catholic Online, "St. John Vianney" see [http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint\\_id=399](http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=399), accessed on April 29, 2014.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory on the Ministry and the Life of Priests*, no. 1; see also *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 15.

needs of the Church and the world.”<sup>50</sup> This main ministry encourages on authentic spiritual renewal for priests. The Year of Priest, 2009-2010, emphasize Evangelization and was prepared by the Magisterium of Pope Benedict XVI.<sup>51</sup>

The work of evangelization follows the order of Jesus Christ which he has for his beloved people. The instruction to evangelize is the first mission of the Church. Every priest should preach and witness the love of Jesus Christ who is the first and greatest teacher and evangelizer<sup>52</sup> to keep the Christian faith successively growing. The central message of faith is that Jesus Christ suffered, died and resurrected. In addition to this He only can lead all nations to the father. The disciples first spread out what they have seen before to share their great happiness with the joy of Christ.<sup>53</sup>

“As the father has sent me, I also send you.” (John 20:21) This verse signifies that all priests fundamentally have the obligation for evangelization. They have to follow this holy mission and continue to spread out the Gospel for the salvation of all mankind.<sup>54</sup>

The other concept refers to the seven Sacraments which have been instituted by Jesus Christ.<sup>55</sup> St. Augustine and the CCC highlights that a sacrament is “the visible sign of hidden reality of salvation.” The primary sacrament is Jesus Christ<sup>56</sup> who saved and sanctified all humanity in his death and resurrection. This is the activation of all sacraments. And St. Augustine and the CCC stresses that the

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<sup>50</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory on the Ministry and the Life of Priests*, no. 16.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 4, 9.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2013), no. 12, 15, 19.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. CCC, no. 425, 426, 429.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory on the Ministry and the Life of Priests*, no. 8.

<sup>55</sup> William Collinge, *Historical Dictionary of Catholicism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Lanham, Toronto, Plymouth: ScarecrowPress, 2012), 388.

<sup>56</sup> Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 209.

sacrament is “an invisible grace”. The Holy Spirit who spreads the grace of Christ works in each of the sacraments. Through this, Christians interact with God and unite themselves with all human beings.<sup>57</sup>

Every moment Christians need the sacraments to nourish their religious lives for maintaining their holy life, especially the sacrament of the eucharist, which is the sacrament of sacraments<sup>58</sup> and the center of life for all the faithful including in particular, priests. St. Thomas Aquinas says that the main function of the priest is to offer the sacrifice of the eucharist. According to the *CCC*, the priest exercises his sacred office “in a supreme degree.” Every priest serves the faithful in his whole life through the holy eucharist. Benedict XVI asks the priests to celebrate the eucharist as the center of their lives and invites them to repeat often the following words of St. John Paul II. “The holy eucharist is absolutely the center of my life and my whole day.”<sup>59</sup>

Priests are united with the bishop in service to the church. Under and with the bishop, they form the ‘*presbyterium*’- a community of priests in unity with their bishop. The Lord entrusted his mission to the apostles who in turn appointed bishops, priests, and deacons. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to the apostles and their successors after he ascended into heaven. Priests and deacons assist and share the fullness of the bishop’s power of orders in service to his flock as a co-worker, not his subject. They incarnate the grace of Christ in their daily life and witness and partake of the spirit of Christ<sup>60</sup>. Thus priests need to be united with Christ and with the bishop and

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<sup>57</sup> St. Augustine, Ep. 187, 11, 34 as cited in *CCC*, no. 774-775.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *CCC*, no. 1210, 1211.

<sup>59</sup> Fausto B. Gomez, “The Following of Christ: The Virtuous Life of a Priest”, *Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinas*, 86, no. 881 (November – December 2010): 595-641, esp. 610.

<sup>60</sup> John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 15.

one another in the Holy Spirit by following his will and witnessing his word and administering the sacraments to the people of God.<sup>61</sup> The ministerial priesthood is the gift of Christ to the Church. Priests are important for Jesus Christ who accomplished salvation on the cross and through his resurrection.<sup>62</sup>

To fulfill their special mission, priests need to practice the virtues of Christ in particular charity above all things. In love, priests are united with Christ and the Bishop and one another and serve their community.

In the succeeding pages the researcher will dwell on the two intertwined aspects of Christian love, namely love of God and love of the neighbor.

### **3. The Love of God**

Only the perfection of love can lead to the perfection of the Christian life. This virtue manifests the love of God and of the neighbor. Love comes from the infinite and divine goodness of God, who is love and the source of charity.<sup>63</sup> All Christians are called to live and further grow in the practice of love. This great virtue is rooted in the sanctifying grace which makes us children of God.<sup>64</sup> This love unites us with God and is the source and form of all other virtues. According to the Christian understanding, Love or charity is one of the theological virtues which are infused by God in us by grace, like the gifts of the Holy Spirit.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory on the Ministry and the Life of Priests*, no. 9.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 1.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Pope Benedict XVI also emphasized that God is Love in his first Encyclical Letter, *Deus Caritas est*.

<sup>64</sup> Sanctifying grace (habitual grace) is the indwelling of the Trinity. It is a real but limited share of divine nature. Through baptism God's creatures become children of God. Cf. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Priest in Union with Christ*, 264.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 107, 266-267.

According to the CCC also the Decalogue is based on love and consists of two main parts which is the love of God (1-3 commandments) and the love of the neighbor (4-10 commandments). These old commandments are directly written with “the finger of God”<sup>66</sup> due to the love of his people unlike the other laws. He reveals his great love with these Ten Commandments.<sup>67</sup>

“You shall love the Lord your God..... This is the greatest and first commandment.” (Matt 22:37-38) Jesus mentions this verse in view of revealing and responding properly to the father’s love.<sup>68</sup> God is the principle of all that is Good and the last end. Our life is grounded in his intrinsic love. Human nature is open towards the perfection of love culmination in the love of God.<sup>69</sup>

The love of Christ is the most important spiritual source for his disciples.<sup>70</sup> They had to learn to imitate this great virtue through what they experienced from Jesus Christ.<sup>71</sup>

To be able to achieve this great love, priests need to cherish devotional prayer. Prayer is God’s gift to them and connects them with God. Humans are needy and wounded beings. They need to nourish their personal relationship with God every day and moment in order to be able to live as good human beings and Christians. Prayer puts their mind and heart into the presence of God. They are called to pray humbly from their whole soul and spirit, especially with their heart as emphasized by the

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<sup>66</sup> CCC, no. 2056.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., no., 2060, 2061, 2067.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., no. 1823.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 107-108.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. CCC, no. 2011.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., no. 1823.

Scriptures, because the human heart is the special place of encounter with the living God.<sup>72</sup>

Jesus Christ showed the example of prayer in the garden of Gethsemane which led him up to the priestly sacrifice on Golgotha. This indicates that also priests should be rooted deeply in prayer like him to be able to serve properly in their ministry. Deepening their spirituality more and more, they are called to live a special and profound relationship with Christ who is the principle of unity and energy of the life of priests. Staying connected with him, they will be faithful and fruitful in their pastoral ministry.<sup>73</sup>

In the *CCC* Christians find three kinds of prayers. The first is the vocal prayer which is an important element of Christian life. Jesus gives the example of vocal prayer by teaching the Lord's Prayer. Christians need to express internal prayer by external prayer too. The second form of prayer is meditation which refers to seeking the truth of God with mind and heart, meditating on the mysteries God and Christ. The third and even deeper kind of prayer is the contemplative prayer which refers to a profound desire to seek Jesus' love with pure faith and by being devoted to him and living in union with him. Contemplating prayer requires constant conversion, a silent contemplative attitude and to cherish quality time with God.<sup>74</sup>

Priests will certainly renew and deepen their ministry through a devoted prayer life. They are also called to embody their profound spirituality in the liturgy. With this precious experience of personal encounter with the Lord as source of energy, priests can continue to serve in pastoral ministry without becoming exhausted. Thus they

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 2558 - 2564.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Ministry and the Life of Priests*, no. 49.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. *CCC*, no. 2700 - 2715.

should offer the Eucharist daily with deep contemplation, meaning silent moments of contemplative prayer should be included in the mass. Strengthened by prayer, priests can commit themselves fully to do God's will and to serve their flock with compassion and joy.<sup>75</sup>

Another important observance of the priestly life is the faithful recitation of the Liturgy of Hours, which is a rich source of energy and grace in the pastoral ministry. Praying the Liturgy of Hours will make their work more fruitful and abundant for the people of God. Through this the faithful will praise God in the midst of the Church, attend the Eucharist and become true witnesses of Christ, which is at the heart of being Church. The readings and prayers of the Liturgy of the Hours will make priests' life more holy and will strengthen their spiritual and pastoral life day by day. Thus their holy prayer will advance their pastoral work, and the participation of the people of God in building the temple of God everyday with the help of the Holy Spirit. In prayer, priests are strengthened by God in their mission to preach the Good news to the ends of the world.<sup>76</sup>

Suffering is also compatible with the virtue of love: true love is ready to suffer and suffering demonstrates true love. God manifests his love through the dedication of a person, Jesus Christ. St. John of the cross in his spiritual canticle underlines that Christ is the treasure of wisdom and knowledge of God. The human soul can possess this extreme ultimate value of him only when it passes through exterior and interior sufferings.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Ministry and the Life of Priests*, no. 50.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. A.-M. Roguet, *The Liturgy of the Hours: The General Instruction with Commentary*, trans. Peter Coughlan and Peter Purdue (Collegeville: Liturgical Abbey Press, 1971), 18.

<sup>77</sup> The Divine Office, 39\*.

The incarnation of Jesus Christ implies the accepting of all aspects of human nature and life, especially also pain, suffering, and even death. Jesus Christ became a man because God loves all humans so much. He suffered a lot with mental and physical pain for the world and even sometimes cried. This kind of anguish shows clearly his great love for his people. He willingly accepted suffering for man freely and from the bottom of his heart. He showed his unlimited love by going through severe suffering Cross. This great power of his love finally took away all our sins which are the true hindrance to love God. At last humans can enter eternal happiness in God through this great love.<sup>78</sup>

The apostles' ministry was filled with a mixture of happiness and suffering similar to the experience of their master, Jesus Christ. They underwent a lot of bitterness and difficulties in their pastoral ministries. It seems that the plan of redemption by Christ failed judged from mere worldly measures by being executed as criminal on the cross. But in fact this laid the foundation for eternal glorification because his love was greater and more powerful than sin and death.<sup>79</sup>

The priests' obligation is not only to live their mission and to administer sacraments, but also to accept the tremendous suffering for their ministry. The reason for their existence is to serve the people of God. For manifesting this love towards the faithful, they have to dedicate their whole life to their ministry day by day, with a humble heart, and they should be especially close to the poor, outcast, and needy. This is a big challenge for priests in every time and place. Priests should face those difficulties with the power and the grace of Christ, who keeps telling them: "I am with

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. Joseph Bobik, *Veritas Divina Aquinas on Divine Truth* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2001), 119-120, 124.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Wilhelm Stockums, *The Priesthood*, 129.

you always: yes, until the end of time.” (Matt 28:20) Thus the suffering of priests is one essential part of their pastoral charity.<sup>80</sup>

The love of God and the love of the neighbor coexists like the face and the back of a coin. The human being cannot love God totally without loving the neighbor. They are always deeply connected in the Christian understanding.<sup>81</sup>

#### **4. The Love of the Neighbor**

The great love of God for mankind is shown in the Paschal Mystery. Jesus says in the Gospel of John: “No one has a greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13). He shows dramatically what real love means and entails on the cross. As the real Good Shepherd, he lays down his life for his sheep (John 10:11). He always offers his whole life for others and in that way shows the way of service ministry to priests.<sup>82</sup> And the way of life is to reach out in fulfilling the Christian perfection and the greatest commandment.<sup>83</sup>

The first important virtue is the compassion for loving our neighbor who is entrusted by God. Compassion is with joy and peace an effect of charity. In the perspective of salvation, love, which is the form of all virtues, is necessary for every virtue. In the life of a priest, compassionate love is pastoral charity. Priests need this virtue to carry out their ministry and produce abundant fruit. They should strive

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Ministry and the Life of Priests*, no. 8, 41, 54.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Meghan J. Clark “Love of God and Neighbor: Living Charity in Aquinas’ Ethics”, *New Blackfriars*, 92, no. 1040 (July 2011): 415-429, esp. 419.

<sup>82</sup> John Cardinal Krol, *The Dimensions of the Priesthood*, ed. The Daughters of St. Paul (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1973), 63.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 111.

therefore to practice this virtue in their life and ministry, in their pastoral work.<sup>84</sup> Actually priests could unite their entire multiple and diverse pastoral activities in this virtue and bring God's grace and love to the faithful. The virtue of compassion inclines them to approach and help those who are suffering, the weak and outcast for whom they have a preferential love.

Priests without compassion and love will not be able to do their work properly. Their ministry will not bear much fruit. Their work for the people will simply be a job. Therefore priests really need to cherish the virtue of compassion in their priestly life and ministry.<sup>85</sup>

Compassion means "with passion" or sympathy or mercy. It inclines priests in particular to be sensitive to the needs of others, above all to those who suffer, and to share in the suffering of others. Through compassion, priests unite themselves with others. Jesus emphasizes this very clearly when he says: "I feel compassion for the crowd" (Matt 9:36); "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life" (Mark 10:45). The true authority comes from service.<sup>86</sup> Priests try to follow the steps of Jesus and form their life as true servants of Christ and his church. With compassion they will carry out their ministerial priesthood enthusiastically. Priests witness this pastoral charity in their daily life, thus giving a good example to all the faithful.

And also the love of the neighbor includes the idea of the zeal for souls for sharing priests' love towards everybody. This idea is similar to piety which means

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. Gomez, "The Following of Christ," 603.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Ministry and the Life of Priests*, no. 54, 55.

<sup>86</sup> Gomez, "The Following of Christ," 603-606.

that Christians should have the sense of adoptive filiation to recognize God as beloved father. The zeal for salvation is the intense love which unites us with God and others. This is an important sympathy which helps us to save the souls.<sup>87</sup> The Apostles and their successors have to keep their faith in Christ with great zeal and hand it over. Their witness and piety represents the evangelizing dimension for saving others. Their great zeal is the fruit of being close to Jesus Christ in faith. This is the beginning and driving force of their pastoral ministry and evangelization.<sup>88</sup> The magisterium of the Blessed John Paul II and Benedict XVI emphasized also the relevance of pastoral zeal for priests.<sup>89</sup>

Good priests love their flock. The priests' heart should be inclined towards the souls in view of salvation. Their precious love will motivate them and guide them in pastoral charity. On the basis of this, priests are called to love the souls of men and women with the heart of Christ. Thus the Lord continues to live with His beloved people through the zeal of his priests. They are the co-workers of God. In any situation they should not lose their sincere heart, especially in despair and in hopeless circumstances. They are called to live daily virtuous, especially patience and self-denial, day by day faithfully so that they can find inner peace and happiness. Their devotion is the true sign of their vocation of being always ready to serve the people of God in a good and bad situation.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Cf. Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 386.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Ministry and the Life of Priests*, no. 21.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Stockums, *The Priesthood*, 34-35, 37.

## D. Conclusion

Spirituality helps people to go deeper into themselves, to transcend their selfishness and to be open to the supernatural dimension of life and the world and to encounter the divine, God.

Christian Spirituality is walking with the Spirit in the path of Jesus. For the Christian, spirituality is the following of Jesus Christ who is the High Priest and Head of his Church. He is the model and example for all Christians, who are called to follow him, in a particular way, as priests.

Priestly spirituality is dealt with in four sections. The first section explains the priestly identity. Christ as the High Priest is the fountain and source of power of all priesthood. The priests should communicate closely with Christ and maintain an intimate relationship with him. Priests always try to imitate to become an *Alter Christus*. In truth, every Christian is asked by his faith in Jesus to be an *Alter Christus*. What makes a priest unique is that he acts *in Persona Christi* by reason of his priestly ordination. Hence, priests should resemble Christ who is holy. Striving ever more for holiness is at the core of their identity and they are called to proclaim the truth to the whole world.

The second section deals with the ministry of the priesthood. Evangelization means to witness Christ and his saving message to all people and peoples of the world. Every Christian receiving Baptism is called to proclaim the good news, especially priests. They preach the good news and are called to be its witnesses. Priests are the sacramental representation of Jesus Christ who is the Head of the Church. Every priest should administer all sacraments which are the visible signs of invisible grace, especially the Eucharist which should always be at the center of their

life. Priests are the members of the church fully entrusting themselves to the Lord and their ministry. They should stay united with the bishop and one another (*presbyterium*). To exercise their ministry they need virtues (the love of God and the neighbor).

The third section deals with the love of God. Priests should love the Lord who is infinite and divine goodness. The love unites all Christians and forms all virtues which are necessary to fulfill their ministry, especially in the face of challenges and difficulties. To maintain this great value, priests need prayer which channels God's grace and refreshes their spirit, especially in contemplation. The most effective way of prayer is the Eucharist which is the way to share the life of God and to be Christ like for others. The enduring suffering of priests for God expresses the way how love is experienced in humans. But also in the poor the Lord Jesus Christ is present, when the Gospel of Matthew says "just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matt 25: 40) Priests in their ministry should show their deep love to the poor even under tremendous difficulties.

The fourth section deals with the love of God, which coexists together with the love of the neighbor to reach Christian perfection. Priests should carry Jesus Christ to others and serve them throughout their lives. Compassion is needed to fulfill this great commandment. And all activities in the ministry should bear the mark of pastoral charity. Priests are called to witness God's love, especially those who suffer, are weak and outcast. Towards those people in need, Christians are called to show their preferential love. Priests need also the zeal of salvation to share the God news with their faithful and all people in the world. This will fill them with inner happiness in any situation. The fruit of it will be evangelization based on the heart of Christ.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A KOREAN MODEL OF A PRIESTLY LIFE: FR. CHOE YANG EOP THOMAS<sup>91</sup>

#### A. An Introduction to the Early Christians History of the Joseon Kingdom

Christianity in the Joseon Dynasty<sup>92</sup> began in the Seventeenth century with few adherents who were mostly members of the higher classes of the society. This group became a minor political party and was searching to find answers for their intellectual curiosity. They continued to study what their ancestors left them in the Eighteenth Century<sup>93</sup>. Many of them went to China as members of the official diplomatic party. They naturally had the chance to be in contact with many foreign cultures. One day they got the opportunity to encounter and read several books about the Christian faith and aside from fulfilling their curiosity for Western learning and cultures, they began to believe that the teaching of the Gospel can help to progress their country intellectually and practically. That was the reason why they brought these books back to their home kingdom and then studied them assiduously and unceasingly. With their attitude of intellectual inquisitiveness, they were gradually opening themselves up to the experience of authentic Christian faith. Thus

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<sup>91</sup> Most of the names are presented in The Hagiography Circle, “The Martyrs of Korea” see <http://newsaints.faithweb.com/martyrs/Korea1.htm>, accessed on august 25, 2015.

<sup>92</sup> This kingdom was established by King I Sung Gue on the Korean peninsula after Goryeo dynasty. The dynasty was from 1392 to 1897 and the governing ideology was Confucianism. Cf. Don Kim, *Korean History Revisited: Joseon Dynasty IV*, (Kor) (Seoul: Sol Press, 2007), 20-21.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Yong Jae Kim, *Korean Church History*, (Kor) (Seoul: Iresewon Press, 2004), 52.

Christianity in Joseon started with a group of ordinary people unlike other Christian communities in Asia and perhaps in the world.<sup>94</sup>

By 1777 almost all of them met periodically to enhance their studies and this group began to accept the teaching of Christianity. At last, I Seung Hun received baptism from a Jesuit priest, Fr. Jean Joseph de Grammont, who gave him the Christian name, Peter. He is considered to be the first recorded Joseon native having received the sacrament of baptism. This took place in 1784 and upon his return to his native country, he began to organize the first Christian community at home.<sup>95</sup>

There is one moving story in Joseon regarding this first beginning of Christianity. One day all the faithful desired to celebrate the mass with sincere faith. To respond to this great longing, I Peter, who was only once experiencing the mass in on the occasion of his own baptism in China, tried to resume the role of the priest himself as good as he remembered. He even then appointed other faithful to celebrate mass but this happened without any involvement of an ordained clergy. The young Joseon church tried to practice the sacrament of the eucharist, confirmation, and penance by themselves (that is, as they understood them) for two years starting in 1786.<sup>96</sup> When they became aware of their theological and pastoral mistake, they wrote a letter of apology to Beijing asking the bishop there to send a priest to minister for them. In response to this petition, the Diocese of Beijing sent the Chinese priest (Blessed) Chu Mun Mo [Zhou WenMo] Iacobus, who became the first ordained priest to enter the kingdom of Joseon in 1794. This marked the beginning of organized

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<sup>94</sup> Cf. You Sin Yu, "Celebrating the Beatification of Korean Martyrs", *Life Today*, August, 2014, 16.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Yun Tek Kim, *The Korea Religion and Church Growth*, (Kor) (Kounggi: Korea Theology Press, 1998), 118.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Hong Youl Yu, *Korea Catholic History I*, (Kor) (Seoul: Catholic Press, 2001), 92-93.

ecclesiastical Christianity, whose birth and history is unique in the church history and world.

The number of Christians of Joseon began to grow rapidly, and the faith was brought both to the learned and nobles who first accepted the new faith, and then to the lower ranks of the Joseon society; to women, children and the unlearned.

Unfortunately, Christianity became at odds with the Joseon culture and traditional beliefs which led many conservative scholars as well as those in the government to proscribe the new Christian faith. The persecution in the Apostolic Vicariate of Joseon started from the incident of Eilsachujojucbal which was the discovering of religious activities by government officials in 1785. As result of this incident Gim Beom U Thomas, who was the first confessor of the Joseon community, died for his faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>97</sup> The situation of intolerance and persecution got ever more severe and extensive over time.

There were mainly two delicate reasons accounting for the persecution of the Joseon Christians. The first reason was the Christian prohibition of ancestral rites. This Christian doctrine stood in conflict with ideas of Confucianism which build the foundation of the Joseon Dynasty and the traditional culture. The whole Joseon society considered Christianity to be a destructor of the social basic system of this land.<sup>98</sup> The other reason was a political factor. The persecutions were also due to the struggle between warring parties within the imperial court system. The adherents of Christianity belonged to the minor party and they increased rapidly. That was why the

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<sup>97</sup> Cf. Sung Tae Kim et al., *Korean Catholic History I*, (Kor) (Seoul: Korean Church History Research Foundation, 2009), 258, 263.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Suk U Choe, *the History of the Korea Nation and Church*, (Kor) (Seoul: Korean Church History Research Foundation, 2000), 90.

ruling party used the tool of persecution to eradicate the opposite political side. Thus the Christians were chosen to be political scapegoats at that time.<sup>99</sup>

Despite these severe persecutions the Apostolic Vicariate of Joseon eventually was established by Pope Gregory XVI on September 9, 1831 with all heart of Joseon's faithful. At last the Joseon community was prepared to become the foundation of developing Christianity in Joseon. At this time, only the MEP had a mission in Joseon with the Bishop, B. Bruguiere's devotion.<sup>100</sup> The Joseon church history had to face difficult times. The Joseon's government finally and formally declared the decree of Chucsayunum on October 1839<sup>101</sup> and prohibited Christianity totally. Later, with God's mercy, the Joseon church was able to enjoy religious freedom upon the finalization of a commercial treaty of Joseon with France in 1886.<sup>102</sup>

The religious persecutions occurred during over a century<sup>103</sup>, though sporadically, but at times they were extremely fierce and tragic. There were five great persecutions during that time: the Sinhae (1791), the Sinyu (1801), the Gihae (1839), the Bungo (1846), and the Bungin (1866) persecution.

Despite a number of apostasies among the Joseon Christians, greater was the number of those who persevered and who were willingly offering their lives to God in

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<sup>99</sup> Cf. Yu, "Celebrating the Beatification of Korean Martyrs," 16-17.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Jang U Lee et al., *Korean Catholic History II*, (Kor) (Seoul: Korean Church History Research Foundation, 2010), 243, 261

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Young Fill Lo, *The Study of Korean Catholic History*, (Kor) (Seoul: Jun Process, 2008), 287.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Hyon Bum Choe et al., *Korean Catholic History IV*, (Kor) (Seoul: Korean Church History Research Foundation, 2011), 70.

<sup>103</sup> This started from the incident of Eilsachujojucbal in 1785 regarding a commercial treaty with France in 1886.

martyrdom. They did not die for politics but clearly for their faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore it can be acknowledged that the church of Joseon is truly built on the blood and spirit of martyrs with the innumerable servants of God.<sup>104</sup>

One main ministry of the MEP was the nurturing of local priests for establishing the local church. This congregation tried to light the fires of hope for the pitiful people. Thus three native boys were chosen by French missionaries to become the first group of seminarians of the Apostolic Vicariate of Joseon in 1836; one of them was Choe Yang Eop Thomas.<sup>105</sup> Let us now look into his exemplar and glorious life.

## **B. The Biography of Choe Yang Eop Thomas**

Korean Catholics believe that Choe Yang Eop Thomas is really a great priest and a true example of faithfulness. The Committee for Beatification and Canonization in the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea (CBCK) began procedures to promote him for beatification on October 12, 1998.<sup>106</sup>

Choe Thomas was born in 1821 in the village of Daracgolsetea, Chungcheong Province. His parents were St. Choe Kyong Hwan Franciscus and Bl. Yi Seong Rye

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. Yu, "Celebrating the Beatification of Korean Martyrs," 16.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Se Young Bae, "The Mission Principle of the MEP in Joseon," *The Collection of Treatises of the Korean Church History I*, (Kor) (Seoul: Korean Church History Research Foundation, 1984):743-767, esp. 747.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. The Committee for Beatification and Canonization in the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea (CBCK), "The Procedure of the Beatification and Canonization of Choe Yang Eop Thomas" see [http://www.koreanmartyrs.or.kr/cyu\\_4.php](http://www.koreanmartyrs.or.kr/cyu_4.php), accessed on august 25, 2015.

Maria. His family members were devoted Christians since the generation of his great grandfather<sup>107</sup>.

Choe Thomas died on the way from Gyeongsang Province to Hanyang<sup>108</sup> to present a report to Bishop Simeon Francois Berneux in 1861. The exact place of his death is unknown. At his deathbed, Fr. J.A.C Pourthie administered the last rites to him. About six months later, the same French missionary transferred the remains of Choe Thomas to Beron,<sup>109</sup> just behind the Saint Joseph Seminary<sup>110</sup>. Today, his tomb is venerated and honored by many faithful.

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<sup>107</sup> The Joseon Church developed through kinship and relationships through marriage. In the beginning, Catholicism in Joseon was introduced to intellectuals; later on their family members also accepted the faith: parents, brothers and sisters, and other relatives through marriage. When the persecution began, they were able to overcome these difficulties because of the web of blood relations. That is why such relationships could indeed be called “holy” families. That is why till this day, this can be considered as the basis of Joseon Catholicism. Choe Thomas’ great grandfather’s name was Choe Han il. His grandfather was Choe In Ju. He liked to help the poor and needy even before they request for help. He was persecuted during the 1791 Sinhae persecutions. In order to save his family, he decided to move to the countryside and settle down in a village called Daracgolsetea, in the Chungcheong Province. His father was Choe Kyong Hwan Franciscus, who was honest and integer of character. From the childhood, he avoided worldly concerns and tried only to learn the catechism by himself. He willingly gave away his wealth and accepted the thorny life of Jesus Christ by following the example of the saints strictly. He suffered torments and died in prison on September 12, 1839. He was canonized in 1984; while his wife, Yi Seong Rye Maria was executed at Dangogae (in Hanyang) during the Gihae persecution on January 31, 1840. She was beatified in 2014 together with the 123 Joseon martyrs by Pope Francis. Here we have some important data on Choe Kyong Hwan: He was a zealous Christian and a catechist who was able to convert the whole village and maintain the fidelity in the faith. He later wanted to leave the village since the residents were getting wealthy and becoming less fervent. Then he decided to move to another village called Guitummi in Mount Suri. He made an effort to build a Christian village there and became the village head appointed by the French missionary Fr. P. P. Maubant. After overcoming all difficulties for being martyr, the officer who was the torturer was deeply moved and said that “could you read for me from what we found in your house because I want to learn your doctrine.” Cf. Ock Hee Kim, *The Priest Choe Thomas and Christian Village*, (Kor) (Seoul: Hakmunsa Press, 1983), 19-26, 29; See also Won Soun Lee, “The Study of Kim Andrea’s Family’s History of Faith and Martyrdom,” in *the Study of Korean Church History Vol 12*, ed. Choe Suk U, (kor) (Seoul: Korean Church History Research Foundation, 1997), 90-91; see also the Letter of Choe Yang Eop Thomas sent to Pierre Louis Legregeois on October 15, 1851 in Jeulgol (VIII), hereafter this letter will be referred to as Letter VIII.

<sup>108</sup> Hanyang is the old name of the capital of Joseon. It is the present day Seoul. Cf. Wikipedia, “The Hanyang” see <http://ko.wikipedia.org/wiki/%ED%95%9C%EC%84%B1%EB%B6%80>, accessed on August 25, 2015.

<sup>109</sup> Today, Beron is one of the major pilgrimage sites of the country. Aside from a beautiful Church, there is the cave where Hwang Sa Young lived and wrote the famous letter asking help from Mspr Gouvea of Beijing for military defense. This was written down in white silk and is now preserved

## 1. The Beginning of Christian Preaching in the Joseon Kingdom

Choe Yang Eop Thomas received a very good education and religious formation due to his parents. In 1836, the French Missionary, Fr. Pierre Philibert Maubant, who took over the authority of Bishop B. Bruguere,<sup>111</sup> asked the faithful of the Christian communities in Hanyang which was the capital of Joseon, for devoted boys in order to educate and form them as minor seminarians.

The first three of those seminarians were Choe Thomas, Kim Tae Gon Andreas,<sup>112</sup> and Choe Bang Je Francis Xavier.<sup>113</sup> The outstanding Choe Thomas was

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at the Vatican. There is also the Saint Joseph Seminary mentioned in the previous note and other buildings. Today, there is a Monastery built for a community of Dominican Nuns. Cf. The Beron Pilgrimage Sites of Wonju' Diocese "The White Silk of Hwang Sa Young" see <http://www.baeron.or.kr/sub2/sub22.php?h=2&m=2&z=2>, accessed on August 25, 2015.

<sup>110</sup> This was the first Joseon seminary officially recognized by the Apostolic Vicariate of Joseon at Beron in 1855. It was established by the Joseph Ambroise Maistre in 1855 and was closed during the Bungin persecutions (1866); all professors were executed and all seminarians were dismissed and scattered. This seminary could not have any single priest. The original building was a simple thatched house with three rooms with a small kitchen and two rooms used by the Rector of the Seminary, J.A.C. Pourthie and the three seminarians (at most six). Beside the house was a courtyard which also served as a vegetable field. According to J.A.C. Pourthie's letter dated November 20, 1865, and that of S. F. Berneux's letter of February 25, 1865, this School/Seminary had a very small space and poor educational facilities. In addition to these, the seminarians were not healthy due to lack of exercise and the constant danger of contracting contagious diseases. According to a Joseon Christian legend, S. F. Berneux (1854–1866) celebrated a funeral mass for Choe Thomas in this seminary. Cf. Un Ha Bea, *Beron: Historical Ground, Learning Ground*, (Kor) (Seoul: St. Paul Press, 1992), 103-108, 119.

<sup>111</sup> After the Apostolic Vicariate of Joseon was established by Pope Gregory XVI on September 9, 1831, separating it from the Apostolic Vicariate of Beijing, Bruguere became its first Vicar. But for setting up this Vicariate, there was an important condition by a Papal Brief by the Pope. The Bishop B. Bruguere should enter the kingdom of Joseon to confirm the effectiveness of that Brief. Unfortunately he was not able to set foot on his own territory due to the opposition of the Portuguese Padroado represented by the Apostolic Vicar of Nanjing and Administrator of Beijing, G. Pires Pereira. The situation was further complicated by the priest named Yu Pacificus, who was dispatched by the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda Fide before him for the mission of Joseon. At that time, Yu doubted Bruguere's appointment and greatly influenced the lukewarm attitude of the Christians to their new Vicar. Bruguere died in Pie-Li-Keou (present day Liaoning Province) in China on October 20, 1835. Cf. Lee, *Korean Catholic History*, 243-254, 265, 273, 278, 280.

<sup>112</sup> Kim Tae Gon Andreas was born on August 21, 1821 in the village of Solmoi, Chungcheong Province. He grew up in a very devoted Christian family. In 1836, Fr. Maubant chose Kim Andreas to be one of the minor seminarians. He was sent to and studied at the MEP Procuration House in Macau with two seminarians. Finally he finished his Philosophy by 1841 with Choe Thomas. With three attempts to return to Joseon, at last he arrived in Hanyang in 1845 with many difficulties. He was ordained as a priest at the Church of Kingahang in China on 17 August, 1845. After arriving at

the first one recommended by the Christians of his community. He arrived first at the residence of Fr. P. P. Maubant where he lived in the house of the Christian Chong Ha Sang Paulus<sup>114</sup> and began immediately to study Latin<sup>115</sup>.

In order to continue their formation, the French missionaries decided to send these three young men out of the country<sup>116</sup> and they arrived in Macau in the

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Hanyang from Shanghai, he began his pastoral work around five months. Unfortunately he suddenly was arrested by the government officials in Backryeong Island during finding the seaway to bring the missionaries. Finally He became the first Joseon priest martyr at Senamtae in the Bungo persecution on 16, September, 1846. He was only twenty five years old. One of his prominent writings he produced is a complete report about the martyrdoms at that time, collect many related documents. Together with this document, he wrote an introduction on how to establish the Church in Joseon, as well as the real facts about the collecting Gihae persecution and the stories of several martyrs in 1839. Cf. Tae Gon Kim, *The Letter of the Priest Saint Kim Tae Gon Andreas: The Collection of Kim Tae Gon's Biographical Materials I*, ed. Choe Suk U, Trans. Choe Sung Yong (Kor) (Seoul: Korean Church History Research Foundation, 1996), 20-22, 28; see also Jong Tea Sae, "The Study of the Activities and Achievements of Kim Tae Gon Andreas," in *Korean Church History*, Vol V, ed. Joung Jong Duk, (Kor) (Suwon: Korean Church History Research Foundation of Suwon, 2008), 171-201.

<sup>113</sup> According to Callery, "he (Choe) had had a better faith and devotion of the three Joseon seminarians. He always did his best with his life and was very obedient in the class and also a good son for his parents. But suddenly he suffered with stomach ulcers of gastritis. After this, his religious life was very serious. He told me *gratias Patri* after the sacraments and continued to repeat Jesus' mercy after kissing the Crucifix. Sadly he could not overcome this disease. He just arrived on June 1837 and died on November 27, 1837". Cf. Letter of Joseph M. Callery sent to Jean A. Dubois (APF vol.11 1838-1839, pp.359-362); see also Maubant Pierre Philibert et al., *The Activities and Achievement of the Priest Saint Kim Andreas: The Collection of Kim Tae Gon's biographical Materials II*, ed. Choe Suk U, Trans. Choe Sung Yong (Kor) (Seoul: Korean Church History Research Foundation, 1996), 79.

<sup>114</sup> Chong Ha Sang Paulus was born in 1795 in the village of Maje, Kyounggi Province; he was executed on 22 September, 1839 (Gihae Persecution) outside of Sosomun. He was the son of Saint Jung Yak Jong who was martyred in 1801 (Sinyu Persecution). During the early years of the Joseon Church, he was chosen by the community to go to Beijing nine times, after receiving the holy sacrament, he was able to have enough courage to throw himself at the Bishop's feet and pleaded for his mercy, asking him to send even a single priest to his homeland. When his pleading failed, he presented a petition to the Holy Father and was accepted by the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda Fide in 1827. In response to his request, Rome decided to send French missionaries and to establish an Apostolic Vicariate for Joseon. Such a development seemed almost impossible especially for an ordinary lay man in those times. S. Laurent Imbert, testified that Chong Ha Sang Paulus "knew his love of God and selected him as a seminarian after Kim Andreas". His famous work known as the "Sangjeasangsea" was the first book on Apologetics in Joseon. In it, he proved the existence of God, the one church in the world, the doctrine of the imperishable soul, the second coming. He was canonized in 1984. Cf. Ha Sang Chong, *Sangjeasangsea* (On the treatise to be submitted to a High Official), (Kor) (Wonju: Beron Shrine, 1981), 1-4, 9-12; See also The Committee for Beatification and Canonization in the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea (CBCK), "St. 103 Korea Martyrs" see [http://www.koreanmartyrs.or.kr/saint103\\_list.php](http://www.koreanmartyrs.or.kr/saint103_list.php), accessed on August 25, 2015.

<sup>115</sup> His companions – Kim Tae Gon Andreas and Choe Bang Je Francis Xavier joined him later

<sup>116</sup>Originally the missionaries wanted to establish a seminary within the country, but due to the instable Church situation, they decided to send them abroad to Macau. Cf. Bea, *Beron*, 101-102.

following year (1837). The Joseon seminarians lived there at the Procuration House of the MEP where they continued their studies under the guidance of the French missionaries. They awaited their turn to go to the missions, instead of the Penang seminary<sup>117</sup> where the atmosphere was not good and many of the students later became arrogant, and critical to bishops.

In Macau, the seminarians studied Latin, Gregorian Chant, Doctrine, French, and Philosophy. The faculty there consisted mainly of missionaries, among them were prominent MEP professors who lived in Macau temporarily, P. L. Legregeois, Napoleon Libois, J. M. Callery, J. A. Maistre.

But since most of these professors would leave for the mission, they could not really offer a systematic theological and pastoral formation to these three Joseon seminarians. In addition to this, the seminarians had to cope with very unfamiliar European languages and a new lifestyle, as well as with bad hygienic conditions and the notoriously humid weather of Macau. And they were tasked to do the common chores such as kitchen work, and simple accounting. As a result, one of the seminarians, Choe Francis Xavier, died within five months after having arrived in Macau. As consequence, only Kim Andreas remained for Choe Thomas as remaining companion and friend from Joseon. Choe Thomas expressed his feelings in this regard especially in his letters; Kim Andreas remained “his only one companion in abroad”<sup>118</sup> and “his most beloved companion.”<sup>119</sup> With deep affection, he recollected

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<sup>117</sup> This was the seminary established in Penang, Malaysia in 1807, and run by the MEP to train the local clergy for China, Vietnam, and other missions in Southeast Asia. The weather and climatic differences of this region was totally different from that of Joseon. Later many Joseon seminarians suffered greatly in this seminary, some even suffered death. Cf. Bea, *Beron*, 131-132.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Letter of Choe Yang Eop Thomas sent to P. L. Legregeois on April 26, 1842 (I), hereafter this letter will be referred to as Letter I.

later Kim Andreas as an adorable and honored friend. Upon becoming a martyr in young age, Kim Andreas became a faithful heavenly guardian for the poor Joseon church before God according to the wish of Choe Thomas.<sup>120</sup>

Despite these great difficulties, the two Joseon seminarians followed all that was asked from them to do in faithfulness and generally speaking the fathers were very happy with them. Father J.M. Callery expressed that the Joseon seminarians have abilities such as good faith, modesty, studying hard and cherishing deep respect for their teachers.

The situation in Macau became more complicated with the violence stemming from the Opium trade<sup>121</sup> starting in 1839 and the following riots and political

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<sup>119</sup> Cf. Letter of Choe Yang Eop Thomas sent to P. L. Legregeois on April 20, 1847 (IV), hereafter this letter will be referred to as Letter IV.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Letter of Choe Yang Eop Thomas sent to P. L. Legregeois on May 12, 1849 (VI), hereafter this letter will be referred to as Letter VI.

<sup>121</sup> The Opium wars occurred between the British Empire and China (Qing Dynasty) in the middle of the nineteenth century. There were two so called Opium wars: The First Opium War (1839-1842) and The Second Opium War (1856-1860). During the period before the First Opium War, the tea consumption had rapidly increased in Britain. The British paid a lot of silver only for tea to China even though China imported some manufactured and raw goods from the British. In those times, the trade imbalance of Britain was three times less between 1710 and 1759 comparing with China. Only Spanish silver dollars could be used as international currency until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When North America became independent from England in 1776, the British could not get any silver. They got a big problem in trading with China. They had to find new goods to retrieve the trade imbalance and this was opium produced in India. There were a lot of cotton trees in India which was a British colonial territory. In Britain, there the production of cotton cloth became very popular thanks to the invention of the steam engine. Consequently, there was overproduction of cotton cloth. They decided to plant opium instead of cotton in India and began to export opium from British India to China. At that time Macau became the only place where all foreigners especially the merchants used to stay until the opening time for the trading in China. The British East India Company had the monopoly of all opium trade in China. As opium addiction became very common, the imbalance of trade was reversed but it created a big social problem. The Qing government proclaimed the edict in November 1836 which prohibited the importation and the use of opium in the empire. But despite this prohibition, the addicted population increased. In the end, the Qing government dispatched Lin Zexu, the governor of Hubei and Hunan High Commissioner to suppress the opium trade. He went to Guangzhou (Canton) and proclaimed the edict which prohibited the use and sale of opium. He also suspended some fifty-four local government officials who were connected to the opium traders and led the destruction of raw opium. In spite of this, He could not eradicate the opium. He was going to fight with the merchant. Lin took intensive administrative measures in 1839 and sixteen hundred residents were arrested in Canton, forty-two thousand opium pipes were confiscated and three thousand chests of opium were seized, and by midsummer, eleven thousand more. Despite these broad stroke efforts, he could not stop it. Finally he

instabilities in the region. It forced the missionaries to send them to the Philippine Islands, where they took refuge at the Dominican House in Lolomboy<sup>122</sup>, at the outskirts of Manila<sup>123</sup>. There they continued their formation of preparing for their priesthood. Despite the mentioned difficulties, Choe Thomas led a devoted and exemplary life as student and seminarian. His teachers evaluated Thomas positively, and “they assure that he would be a very good priest, if he would continually take care of his health well.”<sup>124</sup> As soon as the situation in Macau became more stable, they

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blockaded the factory which played an important role in the opium trade on March 28, 1839 and Elliot who was the Chief Superintendent of the Trade of British Subjects in China capitulated. By these measures, officially all opium was destroyed in China. But The British government made an official complaint against the Qing government. For this, the Opium war took place in Chuanbi on 3, November, 1839 by British ships attacking. The British military forces were better prepared than the antiquated Qing navy, especially with the use of faster steamboats. Macau became a scene of social unrest and constant threat of war between China and the western powers. On 29 August, 1842, both countries finally concluded the war with the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing. As a result, the British received the island of Hong Kong and five major ports were opened for trade with the West: Guangzhou, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai. And the War indemnity was some 21 million dollars. This infamous war ushered in also the continuous foreign incursion over the Chinese territory. Cf. W. Travis Hanes III and Frank Sanello, *The Opium Wars: The Addiction of one Empire and the Corruption of another* (London: Robson Books, 2003), 20-25, 33, 37, 38-41, 48-51, 70, 154-155; See also Fei Chengkang, *Macau: 400 years* (Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Publishing House, 1996), 207.

<sup>122</sup> They stayed there from April 19 to the end of November, 1839. This property was owned by the Dominicans as a summer and rest house in a small village by the sea. Today it is converted into a shrine in honor of Kim Andreas. Cf. Suk U Choe. “The Mission Activity of Choe Yang-Eop Thomas,” in *The Study of Korean Church History* Vol 14, ed. Kim Su Chang, (Kor) (Seoul: Korean Church History Research Foundation, 1999), 10.

<sup>123</sup> While in the Philippines, (March 10, 1839), they (Choe Thomas and Kim Andreas) received a letter from Yu Gin Gil Augustino and Cho Sin Chul Charles. The first one was an interpreter of the Joseon diplomatic mission in the Court of Beijing and the other was a secret messenger of the Joseon Church. According to this letter, they brought with them their family letters; and that the Joseon church had already known the sad report of Choe Bang Je Francis Xavier’s untimely death. The third news was that at last, bishop (S.) Laurent Imbert arrived in Joseon successfully, despite great difficulties. Cf. Letter of M. Libois sent to M. Legregeois on September 11, 1839 (AMF vol. 324, ff. 23-28).

<sup>124</sup> As we can observe one of the biggest problems of the Joseon seminarians and the French missionaries was not the zeal or capacity of the candidates, but their weak physical constitution which made them vulnerable in the warm and very humid climate. They explained that Choe Thomas would be effective for the Joseon Church because of his good health: but Kim Andreas would not be productive, because of his constant migraine, stomachache, and lumbago. Thus they were really greatly worried about Kim Andreas. Cf. *ibid.*; See also Letter of M. Libois sent to the M. Legregeois on June 23, 1839 (AMF vol. 324, ff. 145-149)

returned to the Portuguese colony where they finally could finish their formation and studies in Philosophy in 1841.<sup>125</sup>

## 2. Return to Home, Pastoral Ministry and Early Death

a) *The Preparation for the First Trip*: By 1842, Choe Thomas continued to pursue theological studies in Macau while Kim Andreas had already left Macau for Joseon passing through China<sup>126</sup>.

The commander of the French Fleet in Macau was in need of an interpreter and asked for assistance from the MEP missionaries. It was decided that Fr. Maxime Brulley de la Bruniere and Choe Thomas accompany the fleet<sup>127</sup>. They thought that if they would join the French fleet, they would be able to find a safe and easy way to return to Joseon. They arrived in China on July 1842 disembarking in Wusongkou, which was one of the ports at the Yangtze River. It was here that they were reunited with J.A. Maistre and with Kim Andreas who had left in Macau earlier.

Unfortunately, the fleet changed its route from the original plan. The bishop Louis Theodore de Besi ordered them to come to Shanghai. From there, they were able to seek passage to Northeastern China, arriving in the Christian village of Baijiadian<sup>128</sup>. They proceeded then further to Xiao Bajiazi where they reorganized

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<sup>125</sup> Cf. Sang gun Bang et al., *Korean Catholic History III*, (Kor) (Seoul: Korean Church History Research Foundation, 2010), 147-152.

<sup>126</sup> Choe Thomas studied theology under a famous MEP missionary in Manchuria, M. Maxime Brulley de la Bruniere. As we shall see they will become companions on their journey through China. Cf. Bang, *Korean Catholic History III*, 153.

<sup>127</sup> The fleet's was "La Favourite", under the command of T. F. Page. Cf. Letter of M. Bruniere sent to the M. Jurine on October 22, 1842 (APF vol. 18, 1846, pp. 116-130).

<sup>128</sup> This is one of the first Christian settlements on the Liaodong peninsula. It is now in the Jilin province inhabited by many ethnic Koreans.

themselves and continued their studies with J.A. Maistre. Choe Thomas and Kim Andreas were both ordained deacons by Msgr. Ferroel on 10 December, 1844.

b) *The First Trip through the Northeastern Part of Joseon*<sup>129</sup>: By January 1846, the missionaries and their Joseon deacons tried to seek a route to return to Joseon. Normally there were trading posts and markets between Joseon and the northern part of the country. But it was also very difficult there for there were several problems. First, it was a too long journey on this way which was about 2,000 Li<sup>130</sup> long, requiring to overcome wild beasts and to sleep in tents in the wild open nature. Even though they could reach the border, from there it was not easy to go to Hanyang to meet the Christians there.

Finally, they arrived at the border Village at the Duman River.<sup>131</sup> Secretly they tried to contact some Christians among the Joseon traders coming to the market. Despite overcoming various difficulties, they found themselves suddenly arrested by Chinese authorities and detained for a few days. In the end, they could not accomplish anything but to return to Xiao Bajiazi.

c) *The Second Trip through the Uiju Border*<sup>132</sup>: Choe Thomas made another attempt to find the route home via Uiju on December 1846, while Kim Andreas had

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<sup>129</sup> Kim Andreas already found this route in 1844 but failed. Cf. Choe, “The Mission Activity of Choe Yang-Eop Thomas,” 12.

<sup>130</sup> This is equivalent to about 785 kilometers. Cf. “Calculating the Distance” see <http://search.daum.net/search?w=tot&rtmaxcoll=Z3T&q=%EA%B8%B8%EC%9D%B4%20%EB%8B%A8%EC%9C%84%EB%B3%80%ED%99%98>, accessed on August 25, 2015.

<sup>131</sup> This was located on the north side border between Joseon and China. Cf. Wikipedia, “Duman River” see <http://ko.wikipedia.org/wiki/%EB%91%90%EB%A7%8C%EA%B0%95>, accessed on August 25, 2015.

<sup>132</sup> This place is the important site for trading between Joseon and the Qing dynasty from the seventeenth century on. Two countries had trade between the Uiju border (simply called Junggang) and the Bongwhang fortress border (simply called Checkmun). This route was established by merchants from both countries because this way was the shortest and safest way between both countries. Later many Joseon missionaries used this route to reach Joseon. Choe Thomas and Kim Andreas also used

suffered already martyrdom on September 16, 1846. But due to the high alert of the authorities and the constant danger of being arrested by the Joseon government, he finally had to give up this plan.

d) *Third Trip though the Western Seaway of Joseon (Gogunsan Island)*: J.A. Maistre came to realize that the land route was almost impossible and this plan was finally given up. Thus he determined to try the Western Sea route<sup>133</sup> instead. For that purpose they decided to return to Hong Kong, arriving there in the early time of 1847<sup>134</sup>.

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this path and succeeded to go to Joseon for their great mission. Cf. Young U Han, *The Precious Korean History*, (Kor) (Kyounggi: Kyoungsewon, 2015), 376-378; see also Wikipedia, “Uiju trader” see <http://ko.wikipedia.org/wiki/%EC%9D%98%EC%A3%BC%EC%83%81%EC%9D%B8>, accessed on August 25, 2015.

<sup>133</sup> This route was successfully used by Bishop Jean Joseph Ferreol, M.A.N. Daveluy and Kim Andreas with the honorable ship of Raphael on their return to Joseon on October 12, 1845. Cf. Choe Suk U, *The Arrest and Martyrdom of the Priest Saint Kim Andreas: The Collection of Kim Tae Gon's Biographical Materials III*, Trans. Choe Sung Yong (Kor) (Seoul: Korean Church History Research Foundation, 1997), 268-269.

<sup>134</sup> The Pope gave a special privilege to Spain and Portugal to defend the interests of the Church and her work of evangelization. This took place after the discovery of the new lands for colonization. This was known in Portuguese as the “Real Padroado”, (in Spanish “Patronato Real” or in English “Royal Patronage”). Pope Nicolaus V (1447-1455) declared that Portugal may explore and occupy in Africa for mission with his authority. This is the beginning of the patronage. The patronage consisted of recruiting missionaries to discover lands and colonies overseas, supplying resources, the right of the king to present candidates for bishops and accept tithes. Especially Pope Pius II (1458-1464) gave to Portugal’s king the grand master of the order of Christ. While Spain took most of the territories in Latin America, Portugal received the territories of Africa and Asia, which literally extended to the Far East. Especially Portugal made that Macau was the center of the trading foundation between China and western countries with the permission of the Chinese government. This arrangement became a great hindrance to evangelization because Spain and Portugal used this privilege to extend their colonial control and became bitter rivals in the Far East. In 1622, Pope Gregory XV (1621-1623) established the Vatican institution known as the Sacred Congregation of the *Propaganda Fidei* to balance the power of the two rival countries in their missionary work. By this time, the Holy See began to send missionaries to territories and began the organization of these communities under their supervision without influence of the secular states. The Propaganda Fidei also established a form of recruitment of missionaries by establishing a seminary in Paris. This institution was later known to be the MEP to form and supply much needed missionaries. Both Portugal and Spain was afraid that this arrangement would destroy the Padroado and sooner or later their countries would lose their control over the colonial Churches. That was why they were against Rome sending missionaries to their territories or even use their territories to go to do mission work. These states insisted that it was their right to protect and promote their own missions and not the Pope and thus did not want to protect the missionaries sent by the Holy See, especially the French MEPs. For example, history records that Bishop Brugiere’s trip back to Joseon was hindered by the Vicar Apostolic of Nanjing, G. Pires Pereira due to political reasons. This greatly influenced the missionary work in Joseon. These conflicts

During his stay at the MEP Procuration House in Hong Kong, waiting for the proper time to return to Joseon, Choe Thomas was not idle. He began translating important documents into Latin by the order of Bishop M. Jean J. Ferréol. He wrote there the famous book *The Martyrdom during the Gihae and Bungo Persecution*.<sup>135</sup>

The day came when they were able to get the chance to return to Joseon. The commander of the French fleets<sup>136</sup> intended to go to Joseon to get the reply of the

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continued to progress and worsen the situation in the mission. With great efforts and works by the missionaries of the Pope, three dioceses which were the Beijing, Nanjing, and Macau under the Portuguese padroado were going to become Apostolic Vicariate which shall be under the authority of the Holy See. Cf. Young Chun I, *The Establishment the Korean Catholic Church and the Apostolic Vicariate of Joseon (Kor)* (Seoul: Good News, 2008), 12-22; See also Choe, *The History of the Korean Nation and Church*, 161-162.

<sup>135</sup> For the first time Bishop (S.) Laurent Imbert wanted to record the Gihae persecution which was the second grand scale persecution in 1839 after the great Sinyu persecution in 1801, which were both general and countrywide. The government wanted to prove about the orthodoxy of Confucianism and the heterodoxy of Christianity. This was the reason this persecution was very harsh and cruel. Numerous Christians were arrested. Bishop Laurent Imbert diligently recorded all these data in the famous “Gihae Diary”, a priceless document. This later martyred bishop tried to complete the biographies of these martyrs and a report of the situation of the Church from 16 January until 28 May 27 of 1839. Unfortunately he was arrested; he then handed the manuscript over to Hun Suk Mun Charles, a leader of a Christian village in Hanyang. This Diary became a great source of material on the martyrdom during the Gihae and Bungo persecution and was extensively used during the beatification causes of the Joseon martyrs. Among the martyrs were three French missionaries, Laurent-Marie-Joseph Imbert, P. P. Maubant and Jacques-Honore Chastan. They surrendered themselves to protect the lay people. Their bravery caused a great scandal for the persecutors and brought greater fear upon Joseon government. The first members of the Joseon church were Chong Ha sang Paulus, Yu Gin Gil Augustino, Cho Sin Chul Charles, and Choe Kyong Hwan Franciscus, the revered father of Choe Thomas. These men greatly contributed to the life of the early years of the Joseon Catholic Church even before establishing the Apostolic Vicariate. Later M. Jean J. Ferréol took over this Gihae Diary from Hun Suk Mun Charles and he collected the materials about the Bungo persecution. This document was translated into Latin by Choe Thomas in 1847 while he was still a deacon. The book lists a total of 82 martyrs, of which Choe Thomas translated the biographies of 73 martyrs who were executed in the Kihae persecution (1839). He omitted five martyrs from the original record of 78 as found in the Gihae Diary. J.A. Maistre translated the lives of 9 martyrs executed during the Bungo persecution (1846). This document is composed of an introduction with a short explanatory preface about the martyrs’ history, the application of torture and imprisonment as well as other data to comprehend the violent magnitude of this persecutions. The main body is made up by the biographies of 82 martyrs. This document served as an important source towards the official recognition of the Joseon martyrs by the Church. All martyrs of the Gihae and Bungo persecutions were beatified in 1925 except three. Cf. Yang Eop Choe, *The Martyrdom during the Gihae and Bungo Persecution: The Collection of Choe Yang Up’s Biographical Materials (Supplement)*, ed. Jang Boungh Hun, trans. Choe Sung Young (Kor) (Chungju: Younginmunwha Press, 1997), 11-14; see also Letter IV of Choe to Legregeois; see also Man Sung Chun, “The Christian Persecution in Joseon: The Sinyu, Gihae and Bungin Period”(Kor) Thesis for *the Bachelor’s Degree* (Seoul: The Catholic University, 1994), 11-14.

<sup>136</sup> The commander of the French fleet “La Gloire” was La Pierre, and the fleet “La Victorieuse” had as Commander Rigault de Genouilly. Cf. Yang Eop Choe, *The Collection of Letters*

protest letter by Commander Cecile on July 28, 1847 from the Joseon government<sup>137</sup>. They arrived on the Gogunsan Island which is located in Jeollabuk Province, in the southern part of the peninsula of Joseon. But the French Commander did not get any formal response from the Joseon government. After this, the fleet, together with Choe Thomas and Maistre, had to return to Shanghai<sup>138</sup>. Despite this fact, this was the first time that Choe Thomas could actually set foot on his homeland. But he was not able to stay and had to return to China.<sup>139</sup>

e) *Fourth Trip through the Western Seaway of Joseon (Backlung Island*<sup>140</sup>): After returning to Shanghai, Choe Thomas finished his studies at the Jesuit Seminary of Xujiahui and was finally ordained to the priesthood by Msgr. Francis Xavier Maresca, Vicar Apostolic of Nanjing, on April 15, 1849. He is therefore known as the second Joseon priest after Kim Andreas.<sup>141</sup>

Choe Thomas continued to find the way to reach Joseon through the West Sea route. By May of the same year, he tried to contact Bishop Jean Joseph Ferreol on the

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*of Choe Yang Eop Thomas*, ed. Choe In Bu, trans. Choe Sung Yong (Kor) (Seoul: Bigball Press, 2009), 38.

<sup>137</sup> The protest was written by the Commander of the French Fleet in the Far East, M. Cecille as a formal protest of the French government about the killing of three French missionaries, during the Gihae persecution. Cf. Letter of Choe Yang Eop Thomas sent to P. L. Legregeois on September 20, 1847 (V), hereafter this letter will be referred to as Letter V.

<sup>138</sup> Choe Thomas wanted to stay on, as this was his original plan after suddenly arriving on the island, but he was forced to return with the French fleet by Commander La Pierre. He had no choice but to return to Shanghai. According to his letter "I wanted to stay on in the (Gogunsan) island, many times I requested this from the commander, but he refused to give me permission. Even though I made a *grave promise*... I have Joseon in my hands, but now I have to abandon it again, and return to Shanghai. I cried and shed tears." Cf. Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Bang, *Korean Catholic History III*, 153-158.

<sup>140</sup> Kim Andreas used this route to bring the missionaries in 1846. Unfortunately he was arrested and then became a martyr. Cf. Suk U Choe, "the mission activity of Kim Tae Gon Andreas," in *The Study of Korean Church History* Vol 12, ed. Choe Suk U (kor) (Seoul: Korean Church History Research Foundation, 1997), 14.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Letter VI of Choe to Legregeois.

Backryeong island, using “the complete map” drawn up by Kim Andreas; unfortunately he was unable to meet the prelate, and he had to return to Shanghai again.

f) *As Missionary in Liaodong Peninsula*: With the remote possibility of an early return to his home country and no opportunity for any pastoral work in Shanghai, he was invited to become the secretary of the MEP missionary S. F. Berneux<sup>142</sup>. He assigned Choe Thomas’ then finally to his first mission: the place of his first pastoral work was the Chakou Church in the Province Liaoning. There Choe Thomas zealously served the Christian community by preaching on Sundays and Feast days, teaching Catechism for children and hearing confessions. He stayed in this village for seven months.

g) *The Fifth Trip through the Uiju Border*: Meanwhile Bishop J. J. Ferreol ordered him to make another attempt to return to Joseon together with his former companion and teacher J.A. Maistre. They went to the Bongwhang Fort<sup>143</sup> and secretly met there some Joseon Christians. Due to the uneasy situation in Joseon, only Choe Thomas was finally able to return to the Joseon kingdom on December 1849.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Simeon F. Berneux was ordained on March 20, 1837 in France. After becoming a MEP missionary in July 1839, he went to the mission to Tonkin (North Vietnam). On March 11, 1854, he became the Coadjutor Bishop of Manchuria; and in the same year, on September 5, he became the fourth Apostolic Vicar of Joseon. He arrived in Seoul on March 27, 1855. Compared to his predecessors, his episcopate was characterized with many activities and the overall organization of the Church. The Joseon Church grew in great numbers, he established two Catholic printing presses and published catechetical materials. He collected data on the martyrs and founded the charitable agency known as “Sungyounghoi” which organized the charitable work of the Church in favor of the poor. Unfortunately he tried to meet the king of Joseon. But the king changed his mind and arrested the poor bishop. He was martyred on March 7, 1866 in Seoul. His execution opened the Bungin persecution. He was canonized as a saint in 1984. Cf. Suk U Choe, *Documents on S. F. Berneux* (Kor) (Seoul: Korean Church History Research Foundation, 1995), C-G.

<sup>143</sup> This Chinese fortification is located in the city called Bongsung, in present day Liaoning Province, Northeastern China.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. Boungh Hun Jang, *The Testimony and Korean Church Materials: The Collection of Choe Yang Up’s Biographical Materials III*, (Kor) (Chungju: Younginmunwha Press, 1996), 150.

This was a very historical moment for the Joseon church for there resided no ordained Joseon cleric in this pitiful land after the martyrdom of Kim Andreas.<sup>145</sup> In Choe Thomas the Joseon church could again resume and follow the dream to have native priests in the midst of the harsh situation of persecution. This took place in 1849, and more than thirteen<sup>146</sup> years went by since he left the kingdom of Joseon.<sup>147</sup>

h) *Living The Priesthood on a Thorny Path*: After returning to Joseon as an ordained priest, Choe Thomas immediately began pastoral work for his native people. He was able to meet Bishop Ferreol in the Chungcheong Province and to visit also his own family members who lived dispersedly. During six months (from January to June) in 1850, only Bishop Ferreol and Choe Thomas had to undertake pastoral work and to visit all Christian village of Joseon, because all other missionaries were suffering from a serious illnesses.

This was the first assignment in his beloved motherland at that time. For the great pastoral tasks ahead, he established a strategic post at the center of the Tongcol<sup>148</sup> village for efficient pastoral work. Later he was assigned to care for the Christian communities in the five provinces of the Southern part of the peninsula<sup>149</sup>. Despite the vast territory under his care, Choe Thomas did not cease to work and care for the Christians who lived dispersed in this territory. By the providence of God he

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<sup>145</sup> Cf. Kim Andreas martyred for the Joseon church on September 16, 1846. Cf. Choe Suk U. "The mission activity of Kim Tae Gon Andreas," 15.

<sup>146</sup> It took Kim Andreas nine years (from 1836 to 1845) to return to his motherland. Cf. Ibid., 9, 13.

<sup>147</sup> Cf. Charles Dallet Claude, *Korean Catholic History*, trans. Choi Suk U, An Ung Leal, (Kor) (Seoul: Korean Church History Research Foundation, 1981), 153-157.

<sup>148</sup> This Christian village is now located in the village of Jincheon, Chungcheong Province assumptively. Cf. Choe, *The Collection of Letters of Choe Yang Eop Thomas*, 231.

<sup>149</sup> These provinces are Kyounggi, Chungcheong, Kangwon, Jeolla and Gyeongsang. The territory is quite large, almost the whole of present day South Korea. Cf. Ibid., 58.

could visit himself all Christian villages, which was a huge number. He walked around 5,000 Li<sup>150</sup> and was able to visit 3,815 Christians, heard the confessions of 2,401 Christians, baptized 181 adults, and 94 children without allowing himself a break.<sup>151</sup>

In the following year, he was able to visit 127 other Christian villages, met 5,936 Christians and baptized 197 adults.<sup>152</sup> A few years later (1855), he baptized 240 and heard the confession of 4,500 Christians<sup>153</sup>.

In the later years, the number of missionaries gradually increased and pastoral life became easier than it was before. In 1857, Choe Thomas met 4,075 Christians, baptized 171 adults and heard the confession of 2,867 Christians.<sup>154</sup> He went to remote places in the countryside to help secure the protection of the foreign missionaries. Despite his delicate health and heavy workload, he was always on the move travelling around the country. It was said that he would travel about 7,000 Li<sup>155</sup> annually. He travelled across the country even during the period of the Kyungsin

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<sup>150</sup> This is equivalent to about 1964 kilometers. “Calculating the distance” see <http://search.daum.net/search?w=tot&rtmaxcoll=Z3T&q=%EA%B8%B8%EC%9D%B4%20%EB%8B%A8%EC%9C%84%ED%99%98%EC%82%B0&o=3&q=%EA%B8%B8%EC%9D%B4%20%EB%8B%A8%EC%9C%84%ED%99%98%EC%82%B0+EA%B3%84%EC%82%B0EA%B8%B0>, accessed on August 25, 2015.

<sup>151</sup> This is a great number even for missionaries today, since the extent of the territory was huge given the poor means of transportation at that time. We should also not forget that Christianity was illegal and the missionaries could not work openly. Cf. Letter of Choe Yang Eop Thomas sent to P. L. Legregeois of October 1, 1850 (VII), hereafter this letter will be referred to as Letter VII; see also Bang, *Korean Catholic History III*, 161.

<sup>152</sup> Letter VIII of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>153</sup> From these data, we can also see the zeal of Choe Thomas and the fruits of all his sacrifice and his dedication in serving the Church in Joseon. The Church continued to grow despite the lack of missionaries in the country. We know that by 1856, there were only three Catholic missionaries, two Frenchmen (M.A.N. Daveluy and J.A. Maistre) and Choe Thomas who had to shoulder the great burden of pastoral work. Cf. Bang, *Korean Catholic History III*, 161.

<sup>154</sup> Letter of Choe Yang Eop Thomas sent to P. L. Legregeois on September 14, 1857 (XIII), hereafter this letter will be referred to as Letter XIII.

<sup>155</sup> This is equivalent to about 2,749 kilometers. “Calculating the distance” see [http://search.daum.net/search?w=tot&DA=UME&t\\_nil\\_searchbox=suggest&sug=&sq=%EB%8B%A8%EC%9C%84%ED%99%98%EC%82%B0&o=3&q=%EA%B8%B8%EC%9D%B4%20%EB%8B%A8%EC%9C%84%ED%99%98%EC%82%B0+EA%B3%84%EC%82%B0EA%B8%B0](http://search.daum.net/search?w=tot&DA=UME&t_nil_searchbox=suggest&sug=&sq=%EB%8B%A8%EC%9C%84%ED%99%98%EC%82%B0&o=3&q=%EA%B8%B8%EC%9D%B4%20%EB%8B%A8%EC%9C%84%ED%99%98%EC%82%B0+EA%B3%84%EC%82%B0EA%B8%B0), accessed on August 25, 2015.

persecution (1859 - 1860)<sup>156</sup>. Choe Thomas continued to visit the Christian communities and performed his priestly duties despite the risks and the ongoing threats.<sup>157</sup>

i) *His Writings to support the Mission Effectively*: Despite these difficult pastoral works, he concluded various writings to support his pastoral ministry efficiently and translated several books to preserve precious materials about the predecessors in faith, especially the holy martyrs who gave their lives to God and the church and set an example for others to follow. The most valuable of his writing were his own letters. He wrote them in order to comfort and encourage his flock of sheep he was ministering to. Until now the church secured nineteen of his priceless letters.<sup>158</sup> Eighteen of his letters, which were written between April 26, 1842 and September 3, 1860, still remain at the Martyrs' Museum of Juldusan in Seoul,<sup>159</sup> and

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<sup>156</sup> The Kyungsin persecution (1859-1860) took place suddenly in this poor territory. In trying to win favor for himself, a police captain, named Im Tea Young arrested thirty Christians without previous government permission. The Christians were arrested at their homes and were violently tortured and abused; however, public opinion was behind the innocent victims. This forced the government to release the victims later. At this time, fortunately S. F. Berneux, St. M.A.N. Daveluy, and Choe Thomas were able to flee to safety due to their stay in the country side. Cf. *The Great Korean Catholic Dictionary*, (Kor) (Seoul: Bundo Press, 1999), 330.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Bang, *Korean Catholic History III*, 160-169.

<sup>158</sup> All his letters were written in Latin. All of his professors admired his Latin. That was why the third Bishop, M. Jean J. Ferréol, asked him in Hong Kong that he should translate *The Martyrdom during the Gihae and Bungo Persecution* into Latin from French in 1847. He normally wrote down his letters between September and November in the Christian villages. We can assume that he wrote down these letters in an important Christian village in which he used to rest after visiting other villages. For example, the village Jeulgol of the eighth letter and the village Donggol of the eleventh letter are very important for Joseon Christianity which was the center of Choe Thomas' ministry. His letters have a great and significant historical and spiritual meaning as primary historical material because all content comes from his direct experience, seeing with his own eyes, and feeling what he experience. Cf. Choe, *The Collection of Letters of Choe Yang Eop Thomas*, 201-205.

<sup>159</sup> The MEP donated Choe Thomas's eighteen letters to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea on June 23, 1997. Cf. *Ibid.*, 201.

one other letter was found in the documents of John Bowring (1792-1872) dating from October 23, 1853, who was the fourth governor of Hong Kong.<sup>160</sup>

In addition to these letters, every year he also sent annually a letter to the Joseon seminarians who were studying at the Penang Seminary.<sup>161</sup> Unfortunately, these letters disappeared. But we can assume today that he wrote more than 20 letters. Among the nineteen preserved letters, twelve of them were addressed to his beloved professor, P. L. Legregeois.<sup>162</sup> And five letters (the tenth, fourteenth, sixteenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth<sup>163</sup> letter) were sent to his revered professor, N. Libois.<sup>164</sup> And the other letters were addressed to two other professors.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> John Bowring sent this letter to the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Clarendon, as the diplomatic representative of Britain in China on September 25, 1854. Cf. *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. Letter of Choe Yang Eop Thomas sent to N. Libois of September 15, 1857 (Letter XIV), hereafter this letter will be referred to as Letter XIV.

<sup>162</sup> Fr. Pierre Louis Legregeois (1801-1866) was one of MEP's members as a missionary. He was appointed as the representative of the MEP's procuration of Macau in 1830. He established the seminary in this house for Joseon seminarians temporarily in 1837. He was a professor of three Joseon seminarians. In the end of 1841, he became the leader of the MEP's seminary in France. Cf. Pierre Philibert Maubant et al., *The Letters of Professors and Companion Clergy; The Collection of Choe Yang Up's Biographical Materials II*, ed. Jang Boung Hun, trans in Korean by Choe Sung Yong (Kor) (Chungju: Younginmunwha Press, 1997), 25.

<sup>163</sup> This letter is presumed to have been sent to his professor in Macau, N. Libois. Cf. Choe, *The Collection of Letters of Choe Yang Eop Thomas*, 118.

<sup>164</sup> N. Libois (1805-1872) was one of the MEP's members as a missionary. He designated in 1837 as a missionary of Macau. He became the successor of P. L. Legregeois. He also was a professor of Choe Thomas and Kim Andreas. Finally he became the representative of the MEP's Procuration House in Macau in the end of 1841. He transferred this MEP's procuration from Macau to Hong Kong in 1847 for the sake of more freedom in the mission. He turned back to Paris in 1866. Cf. Maubant, *The Letters of Professors and Companions Clergy*, 53; see also Yang Eop Choe, *Laying the Foundation and establishment of the Church: The Collection of Choe Yang Eop's Letters*, trans. Jong Jin Suk, (Kor) (Seoul: Pauline Press, 1999), 11.

<sup>165</sup> The seventeenth letter was sent to P. L. Legregeois and the Head Professor of the Seminary, and the nineteenth letter was sent to N. Libois and P. L. Legregeois.

He wanted to make the teaching of the catechism and of faith easier. For that purpose he created and wrote the “*Chunjukasa*”<sup>166</sup> to facilitate better teaching and memorization. He wrote it in the famous lyric literary style of Joseon, the *Kasa*<sup>167</sup>.

This popular lyrical form could help catechumens and Christians to learn the Christian doctrines with ease and keep them in their memory within a very short time. Another reason for him to compose the *Chunjukasa* was to care better for social minorities who were the poor, women, and the illiterate. In fact, they made up the majority of the Joseon church at that time. The *Chunjukasa* helped them to learn the church doctrine orally by memorization. This style also deepened the impact of his pastoral ministry by being a very effective way of mission by assisting those who wanted to learn about the truths of Christianity in an accessible way.

He prepared an edition of the *Chunjukasa* as a collection of numerous *Kasas* he composed himself. In this way, he tried to help many Christians and catechumens to approach the Christian Teaching of God with ease because he wrote it in *Hangul*.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> The *Chunjukasa* consisted of four books: namely: “Sunjongga” (translated as “Song of Happy Death”), teaching Christians how to win a happy death and enter eternal happiness through self-denial; “Sasimpanga” (Translated as “Song on Particular Judgment”) deals with how the faithful could prepare themselves confronting their final judgment; “Kongsimpanga” (translated as “Song on General Judgment”) taught how Christians are to prepare themselves to die and face God’s final judgment. And lastly the “Sahangga” (translated as “Song to remember our Homeland”) narrates the soul’s yearning and lament for heaven. This last book is very significant since Choe Thomas used confucianist ideas and values to present the Christian catechism and the concept of eternal life. It also contains a basic presentation of the traditional Four Last Things. Choe Thomas used this booklet to present the conflict between Christianity and Confucianism. Cf. Hee Chan Yang et al., *The Mission and Chunjukasa of the Priest Choe Yang Eop Thomas: The Collection of the Studies of Yang Eop II* (Kor) (Chungju: Yang Eop Korean Church History Research Foundation, 2003), 307-315.

<sup>167</sup> *Kasa* consists of poetic couplets which were easier to remember and easier to recite due to the rhymes and rhythm of the phrases. As lyric poetry it is one of the famous and representative forms of Joseon literature. Every class of the Joseon society expressed their mind in this form of lyric poetry, thus making it very popular. Authors range from the upper class to the lower classes of the society. Cf. Duk Sung Kim, *A Study of Catholic Literature during Times of Persecution*, (Kor) Thesis for the Bachelor’s Degree, (Seoul: The Catholic University, 1995), VI-VIII.

<sup>168</sup> “Hangul” is the name for the Korean characters created in 1443 by King Se Jong. He thought that the Chinese characters were very difficult for the lower classes and he tried to ease the burden because of his love for the people. Through this he intended to raise the spirit of the nation and

Eventually, they could study, meditate and perform spiritual exercises by themselves even without access to a spiritual director or a priest. This pastoral work was very important due to the constant persecutions and the lack of clerics and missionaries, hoping that by the help of these Kasas, the faith could be deepened, better understood, lived and further promoted by the Christians themselves. This was perhaps also one of the main reasons why the Christian faith had become very strong among the Joseon Christians despite the severe persecutions and national calamities during that period of time. In that way the Church in Joseon got also prepared to give to the church, so many glorious martyrs.<sup>169</sup>

Choe Thomas also wrote two prose essays which have been written in Latin. One of them teaches about repaying grace between a human and a lion. The other one is teaching about forgiveness and the love of enemies between a religious and a lay person.<sup>170</sup>

In the third trip Choe Thomas translated a very important book, *The Martyrdom during the Gihae and Bungo Persecution*.<sup>171</sup> Unfortunately, this precious and famous book could not be finished by him sufficiently and satisfactorily. He believed that he needed to collect more information for completing it. He then began to collect a lot of materials concerning the bloody witness of many missionaries including his own relatives. First of all, he made a thorough research about his own

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organize the political system new and well. This is also the phonetic script used today. But in reality at that time, Hangeul despite being a popular script of the masses, was looked down at by the educated class especially the Confucianist scholars. Cf. Wikipedia, "The Hangeul" see <https://ko.wikipedia.org/wiki/%ED%95%9C%EA%B8%80>, accessed on August 25, 2015.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. Bang, *Korean Catholic History III*, 175-176.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. VV. AA., *The Letters of the Priest Choe Yang Eop: The Collection of Choe Yang Up's Biographical Materials I*, Ed. Jang Boung Hun, Trans. Choe Sung Yong (Kor) (Chungju: Younginmunwha Press, 1996), 323-329.

<sup>171</sup> See the CHAPTER TWO.

parents, Choe Kyong Hwan Franciscus and Yi Seong Rye Maria in 1851. This was later sent to Fr. P. L. Legregeois. He then continued to pursue research about Choe Hae Sung, who died as a martyr during the Gihae persecution and also about other important Christian witnesses. Even though it was not easy to get direct accounts of eyewitnesses or living testimonies for these works, he was able to achieve a great accomplishment through his careful compilation of all available and relevant materials.

In 1859, he also translated and accomplished two books together with Msgr. M. Antoine Nicolas Daveluy; the one was a devotional book entitled *Chunjusunggukongga* which was the first Hangul prayer book and the other was a classical catechetical book entitled *Sungguyorimundap*<sup>172</sup> which was the first dogmatic book in Hangul officially approved by the Joseon church.

At that time only the catechetical text book called *Sabonmundap*<sup>173</sup> was available. Choe Thomas acknowledged and admitted about this book that those who could be prepared for the Sacrament of Baptism with this book were only few, because for most people it took many years to learn the content of this catechetical book. And there were even faithful who could not learn the content of this book properly until they died. The reason for this was that Bishop S. F. Berneux issued a

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<sup>172</sup> It contained the four sacraments, namely: baptism, confession, eucharist, and confirmation. The style was simply in form of questions and answers. It was the first formal catechism of Joseon introduced by the new group of intellectuals of Confusionists in 1864. The book is a very important document for the Joseon church and was used for a period of seventy years. Since the Christians could not print them publicly, they produced private books it print and circulated them, until the establishment of the first Christian publishing facility in 1864. Cf. In Sung Yang, "Sungguyorimundap I," in *Church and History* (Kor) Vol. 314(2003 October): 18-22, esp. 18-19.

<sup>173</sup> Literally translated as the "Four Books of Catechism". It four books consisted of four smaller booklets each corresponding to one of the sacraments of Christian initiation (Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation), and Confession. It was written in classical Chinese characters so it was hard for ordinary Koreans to understand who are not educated to use such books. Cf. Bang, *Korean Catholic History III*, 173.

decree stating that priests should not baptize any faithful who did not finish to study this book. Choe Thomas complained therefore that so many faithful could not receive baptism even though he had more than the 400 catechumens in 1858.<sup>174</sup>

This is the reason why he started efforts to write *Chunjukasa* and develop prayer and catechism books, but at this time, he wrote in Hangul which was more popular and easier to understand for the majority of people who were not familiar with Chinese characters.<sup>175</sup>

j) *Death of a Saintly Pastor*: During the Kyungsin persecution, Choe Thomas fled to the Christian village of Juklim, in the Province Gyeongsang. Despite the dire situation, he continued with his pastoral ministry by traveling to Christian villages during the day and administering the sacraments during the night. Before dawn he would leave and continue to travel to the next village<sup>176</sup>. On 15, July 1861, he wanted to present a report of the situation of the Christians to Bishop S. F. Berneux who was in Hanyang. He set out on a journey to the capital, but unfortunately he died on the way due to over-exertion and catching typhoid fever.<sup>177</sup>

In a letter to Msgr. P. L. Legregeois, reporting on the sudden death of Choe Yong Eop, the French missionary S. Feron gave the following lamenting testimony:

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<sup>174</sup> Cf. Letter of Choe Yang Eop Thomas sent to P. L. Legregeois of October 3, 1858 (XV), hereafter this letter will be referred to as Letter XV.

<sup>175</sup> By the year 1850, there were a great number of conversions, among them people from the lower classes and women who were mostly illiterate. Because of this, there was a need to re-edit the Chinese catechism used in Joseon at that time. The idea of a Hangul translation by Choe Thomas was perhaps the most excellent idea since he wanted that these illiterate and unlearned Christians could also be instructed with sound doctrine to become good and fervent Christians. Cf. Bang, *Korean Catholic History III*, 170-175.

<sup>176</sup> This way of doing missionary pastoral work had been typical in many countries who were under persecution in Japan, China and in Vietnam. But one of the reasons why Choe Thomas would leave these communities before dawn was that he did not want to burden the Christians in these villages and to insure not only his own safety but also to protect the poor Christians from harassment.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 177-179.

“This is a tragedy for the whole Catholic community of Joseon and they have no cure for this suffering because the western missionaries cannot serve them like a native priest”.<sup>178</sup>

### **C. Conclusion**

Finally, I want to summarize this short treatise of chapter two. In the Middle Age of the Joseon Dynasty (1785 - 1866), the Christians suffered from cruel persecutions, especially after the promulgation of the Decree of Chucsayunum in October 1839. The Joseon’ government absolutely forbid the Christian faith in the whole kingdom of Joseon. Extremely severe and tragic persecutions followed this decree. The life of Choe Yang-Eop Thomas (1821-1861) fell in the middle of this period. His ancestors, brothers and sisters suffered also for their faith and some of them were even executed, e.g. his own father, St. Choe Kyong-Hwan Franciscus and his mother, Bl. Yi Seong-Rye Maria. He lived a very challenging and glorious life, and he always lived at the edge of encountering death in front of his eyes. He was always ready to offer his life for God and the Christians of Joseon.

He grew up in a very devote family. Through his excellent education in faith, he was chosen to join the first group of minor seminarians of the Joseon’s church. Fr. P. P. Maubant and his professors were strongly convinced that he would become a good and indispensable priest for Joseon Church.

His life in exile started in Macau. There he lost Choe Bang-Je Francis Xavier and later also his beloved companion, Kim Tae Gon Andreas, who became a martyr before his reaching in Joseon. After four trips and with the providence of God, he finally could enter the kingdom of Joseon. He had spent thirteen years outside of his

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<sup>178</sup> This was written exactly ten days after the death of Choe Yang Eop Thomas. Cf. Letter of M. Feron sent to M. Legregeois on July 26, 1861 (AME Vol. 579, ff. 565-567).

home country. In the land of Joseon he was in charge of nearly 120 Christian villages in five provinces of the Joseon church, which entirely consisted at that time of eight provinces. He travelled by foot 2,749km and administered sacraments to roughly six thousand Christians<sup>179</sup> every year.

During the period of severe persecutions, the Joseon Christians were left alone for a long time with no cleric to assist and console them. The hierarchical church during that time could not really take care of the Joseon Christians. But by God's love and providence, Choe Thomas was sent to these poor faithful to assist them. His precious presence meant a great consolation for them and safety in spite of the dire persecution.

Choe Thomas' greatness is not only that he was one of the first group of seminarians and priests from Joseon to be ordained, but he could devote his whole life to the people of God compared to other missionaries of who almost all of them served them only a very short time. He took over the entire difficult mission during twelve years for all most missionaries became either martyrs and died with serious diseases. As a native priest he could move around easily. Due to the challenging circumstances, he could not rest properly and over time, he died on a journey due to overwork and physical exhaustion.

But he could accomplish many important things for his poor faithful even being constantly under the danger of life. He finished important writings; the letters, the book of Chunjukasa, and two compositions. And he also translated several relevant books; the book *The Martyrdom during the Gihae and Bungo Persecution*, the devotional book entitled *Chunjusunggukongga*, and the classic catechism entitled *Sungguyorimundap*.

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<sup>179</sup> Choe, *The Collection of Letters of Choe Yang Eop Thomas*, 6.

## CHAPTER THREE

### SOME ASPECTS OF THE PRIESTLY SPIRITUALITY IN CHOE YANG EOP THOMAS

The researcher describes the theological foundation of the priestly spirituality in chapter one and in chapter two the thorny glorious life of Choe Yang Eop Thomas as a poor priest during the times of severe persecution of the Joseon Dynasty.

Now the researcher is going to highlight some elements of Choe Yang Eop Thomas' excellent priestly spirituality following up on chapter one and two, especially by studying his nineteen letters, written in Korean and based on his challenging experiences. In four points his priestly spirituality shall be demonstrated: A. The Priestly Identity, B. The Ministry of the Priesthood, C. The Love of God, and D. The Love of the Neighbor.

#### **A. The Priestly Identity**

Choe Thomas was really faithful to Jesus Christ who was the primary source of his spirituality and ministry throughout his whole priestly life. He showed that he built his priestly identity by communicating with Christ. He received this idea already from his parents, especially from his father, St. Choe Kyong Hwan Franciscus. Choe Thomas described in his letter that His father was very close to Jesus Christ and voluntarily abandoned all his personal property to follow him, because all surrounding people assailed him and his family. This was why he went up to a remote mountain and there he built up a Christian village. If he was persecuted in there, he would move to other places where there is nothing. His daily life was marked with extreme hardships. But he never blamed God for it, rather he accepted all poverty and disasters

willingly and completely in faith for Christ's sake. He was the only hope for him to find meaning in his challenging Christian life.

When all members of the Christian village were arrested and brought into custody, he reminded them as head of the village on Jesus Christ who suffered for them on his holy Cross and encouraged them to become martyrs. On their way to the city, the bystanders cursed the Christian faithful through slander and appropriation of their processions, but Choe Franciscus continued to encourage and inspire them by confessing: that "O, my beloved brothers and sisters, do not be discouraged yourselves to become martyrs. Think about our Lord Jesus Christ who is climbing up towards Mount Calvary with his heavy cross and is leading our procession."<sup>180</sup>

His mother, Bl. Yi Seong Rye Maria, accepted also willingly all hardships and difficulties for Christ. When she had to move and walk to a distant place, she told to her children the story of Christ who ascended to Calvary with a cross and the story of the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt in order to animate them to persevere in difficulties. She also became a great witness for Christ when she was brutally tortured during an inquisition.<sup>181</sup> This great faith of his parents in mind, Choe Thomas' vocation grew and became stronger and he became more and more intimate with Jesus Christ throughout his whole life. His childhood education in faith laid the foundation of his priestly vocation.

Choe Thomas really wanted to unite himself with our Lord who he considered as the creator and savior of his life. During his years as a seminarian, the young Choe Thomas always prayed to our Lord Jesus Christ who shed his precious blood generously. To serve the holy church of Joseon he awaited that day with assiduous

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<sup>180</sup> Letter VIII of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

prayers and appeals. He prayed that he would be granted the zeal to preach the Gospel to his native Joseon. His spirituality developed and progressed further when he was in formation at the MEP Procuration House in Macau<sup>182</sup>

With his very well developed spirituality and a good health, his professors praised Choe Thomas to the point acclaiming that he definitely would become in the future one important pillar of the Joseon's church as a native clergy man comparable to Kim Andreas.<sup>183</sup> According to Napoleon Libois, Choe Thomas's faith was the strongest among the three Joseon seminarians.<sup>184</sup>

In 1846, Choe Thomas continued to attempt to return to his native homeland during his second trip while Kim Andreas already entered the country and died there as a martyr<sup>185</sup>. At that time his mind was greatly troubled due to challenges in his ministry. He expressed the distress he suffered in his letters. His soul suffered great desolation and he experienced a heavy heart for he could not find any way to enter his homeland at that time. In addition to this, his only one and most beloved companion, Kim Andreas, as mentioned in the second chapter, entered already the bosom of the glory of God. That is why he always bent his head down facing the ground as an act of patient acceptance of God's will, as described by him in his letter; his spirit was deeply depressed at that time and he experienced a heavy heart.

But when he remembered the word of Christ "when they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say because what you are to

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<sup>182</sup> Cf. Letter I of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>183</sup> Kim Andreas' health was not good when he was abroad during his formation time. He always suffered very seriously from a stomach disease and lumbago. And he had a serious headache so that his hair color was going to be white. Thus Kim Andrea's professors were always worried about his health condition, unlike Choe Thomas. Cf. Letter of N. Libois for M. Legregeois on August 11, 1839 (AME vol. 324, ff. 23-28).

<sup>184</sup> Cf. Letter of Joseph M. Callery for Jean A. Dubois (APF vol. 11 1838-1830, pp. 359-362).

<sup>185</sup> See the second trip to the Uiju border described in the second chapter.

say will be given to you at that time.” (Matt 10: 19) he could experience some comfort. He understood the phrase “to speak” not only as to preach but also meaning everything whatever he had to do in faith in great hope in God. He strongly believed that all this came from the power of the cross of Jesus. This is also why his only remaining wish was to learn more from Jesus Christ, who was crucified and became the real source of power. And at the cross is the place to find the spiritual energy to continue to follow and imitate Christ.<sup>186</sup> He wanted to participate in the salvific work of Christ by dedicating his whole life, body and soul, as a missionary priest, to the mystery of the cross by actively participating in the passion of Christ<sup>187</sup>. Thus he eagerly wanted to become a martyr like Kim Andreas.

After the failure to reach Joseon on the second trip, he inevitably had to return to Xiaobajiazi in Manchuria and from there to return to Hong Kong. While at prayer, he contemplated that the only hope of the great mission in his native Joseon depended on God’s mercy and not on the will of missionaries. That is why he also wished that God’s will might be accomplished in his own difficulties and sacrifices. This was an act of absolute hope and faith in God. Added to this, his only desire was to die and to be buried as his way of following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.<sup>188</sup>

Despite the consecutive failures, he continued to keep faith in Jesus Christ even though he was in despair and could not experience any will when he failed also on the fourth trip from Shanghai to Backryeong Island. But he did not give up the hope that God would accomplish his mission in the land of Joseon, for he worked only for God’s will, not for his own. Even though his plan was not fulfilled, it was no

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<sup>186</sup> Cf. Letter of Choe Yang Eop Thomas for P. L. Legregeois of December 22, 1846 (Letter III), hereafter this letter will be referred to as Letter III.

<sup>187</sup> Cf. Letter of Choe Yang Eop Thomas for P. L. Legregeois of May 19, 1844 (Letter II), hereafter this letter will be referred to as Letter II.

<sup>188</sup> Cf. Letter IV of Choe to Legregeois.

problem because God prepared that he could bear a holy fruit after tolerating the numerous sufferings, bearing all these hardships with patience. That was why he wanted to learn the virtue of perseverance passing through all these difficulties like Christ who endured all his suffering which bore so much fruit at the end.

But he realized that he still harboured a lack of patience to receive God's mercy. From the teaching of Jesus Christ he learnt that he should wait for the time when God's will could be fully accomplished. Through this instructive spiritual lesson, he could continue to prepare the fifth trip with even greater perseverance.<sup>189</sup>

Finally he could die peacefully in the bosom of Jesus Christ. The bishop Simeon Francois Berneux described that Choe Thomas had a strong devotion and possessed the fiery pastoral zeal for the poor souls of Joseon. The number of faithful had grown exponentially because of him. One day he faced inevitable death on the way to Hanyang in order to report to the bishop about the results of his ministry. Fortunately, one of his companions, J. A. C. Pourthie, arrived there before his death. He only heard that Choe Thomas got sick and dramatically continued to repeat only two words with feeble voice unconsciously; the holy Name of "Jesus and Mary". For twelve years, he inspired the people with all his effort to save the souls of the Joseon Dynasty as their holy priest.<sup>190</sup>

He especially emphasized the idea of the "spirit of Christ" when he criticized the social classes of Joseon<sup>191</sup>, especially the Yangban class. He explained what Christ

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<sup>189</sup> Cf. Letter VI of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>190</sup> Cf. Letter of S. F. Berneux to M. Albrand on September 4, 1861 in Joseon (HB-20).

<sup>191</sup> There were only two social classes according to national law in the early years of the Joseon dynasty; the Yangin and the Novi class. The Novi could not live by themselves due to poverty. Some of them belonged to the Yangin who enjoyed all civil rights and they were treated like a private property by them. But they had the half of civil right which was different of the slave of the ancient times and of the serfdom of the middle ages of the western world. In the late Joseon dynasty, the class of Yangin separated into two classes; the Yangban, the Sangmin practically, not legally. The problem

died also for social justice. He always encouraged the poor and underprivileged through His preaching and devoted priestly ministry. And He blamed the arrogant Yangban class for abusing their privileges and for not accomplishing God's justice. Basically the reality of the Joseon's society stood in contradiction to the spirit of Jesus. Thus to pronate the kingdom of God in the land of Joseon, the Christians should seek to follow the spirit of Jesus by respecting fundamental human dignity and rights which God gave to all people and to love each other reciprocally.<sup>192</sup>

And Choe Thomas used to proclaim our Lord Jesus Christ to his faithful as best possible as he could. When Barbara, who was a very faithful Christian and virgin, was going to die, he said to her that he was going to say a mass for the rest of her soul and she also should remember him in front of the eyes of "our Lord Jesus Christ and Blessed Virgin Mary."<sup>193</sup> He also mentioned the example of another Joseon's faithful, a woman he met and who begged for food on the street. She intentionally abandoned her wealthy family for "Christ" by herself.<sup>194</sup> Those who suffered and were persecuted for Jesus Christ were called "the soldiers of Christ".<sup>195</sup> And those who were put into prison and were persecuted for keeping their faith were called "captives

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was the benefit and privilege of Yangban; exemption of some of taxes, the privilege to get recommendation from government officials, and the informal ruling of their communities. Through this privileges they sometimes exploited the secondary class people. That was why Choe Thomas pointed out and blamed the unjust system of social classes. In addition to this, this structure produced many problems in the Christian villages as well. The class of Yangban could not easily abandon their behavior after becoming Christians. They turned back to their previous habits and attitudes, or became even worse when they were in a desperate condition. He worried that the unproductive conflict of the social classes would divide and destroy the Christian community. Thus the people of God suffered from persecution and a wrong social system. Cf. Han, *The Precious Korean History*, 281-283; see also Hyung Sic Sin, *The New Chronology of Korean History* (Kor) (Seoul: Jurusung, 2014), 290-292; see also Letter of Choe Yang Eop Thomas sent to N. Libois on May 12, 1849 (X), hereafter this letter will be referred to as Letter X; see also Letter of Choe Yang Eop Thomas sent to P. L. Legregeois of October 8, 1855 (XI), hereafter this letter will be referred to as Letter XI .

<sup>192</sup> Cf. Letter XIV of Choe to Libois.

<sup>193</sup> Letter VII of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>194</sup> Letter XV of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>195</sup> Letter II of Choe to Legregeois.

by Christ”.<sup>196</sup> He himself always added “through Jesus Christ” at the beginning or end of his letters like when praying.<sup>197</sup> There was one particular dear expression for him which was “the heart of the holy bosom of Jesus Christ who is our head”<sup>198</sup>

Contemplating on his priestly identity and holiness, he certainly tried always to be very close to Christ and to receive Christ’s power and grace for his ministry. He was the entire source of his whole life and missionary service. When he encountered difficulties, he first meditated on the teaching of Jesus, especially on the mystery of the Cross, his death and resurrection. He truly had an intimate relationship with him and he could devote his whole life to Christ.

## **B. The Ministry of the Priesthood**

Let us now discuss the ministry of his priesthood at length. How did Choe Thomas realize this task? One important point of his ministry as a priest in the land of Joseon was *evangelization* by preaching the truth in the “Christian villages” and administering the sacraments. Let us not forget that this was during the period of persecution of Christianity of the Joseon Dynasty.<sup>199</sup> Even missionaries, who arrived there fortunately thanks to overcoming all obstacles and entered the land of Joseon, continued to suffer following their evangelization efforts and preaching, similar to the beginnings of Christianity in the early church, as a *religio illicita* in the Roman times.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Letter VIII of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>197</sup> Letter II of Choe to Legregeois, Letter IV of Choe to Legregeois, Letter VI of Choe to Legregeois, Letter VII of Choe to Legregeois, and Letter XIV of Choe to Libois.

<sup>198</sup> Letter VI of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. Letter VIII of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>200</sup> Cf. Letter X of Choe to Libois.

Though at times, the intensity of persecution weakened due to political changes, the Christians continued to be persecuted because of those people who wanted to deprive the Christians of their possessions without any reason whatsoever. Despite these illegal and unjust methods, nobody accused them directly before the government.<sup>201</sup> When Christians were apparently rich, everybody tried to deprive these Christians from all kinds of property.<sup>202</sup> That was the reason many Christians could not continue to live in ordinary villages when living according to their faith.

They had to move up to remote mountains or desert places where nobody could find them. Choe Thomas called these places “the Alps of Joseon” because it was very harsh there and steep to climb on these mountains. In addition to this, those places were small and with uneven ground so that people could not stay there in large numbers. Consequently, they scattered throughout the whole mountain range of Joseon. The highest estimate accounts that there were forty to fifty hidden Christians per village.<sup>203</sup> The life situation in these Christian villages was especially dire for the poor and the sick due to the unhealthy and challenging environment and risky circumstances.

These Christians gathered there after having escaped from the hands of non-believers; parents, husbands and wives, relatives, neighbors, and ferocious government officers. They were happy when they were able to live for two or three years in freedom to practice their faith. Thus many Christians left their original villages and abandoned everything whatever they possessed and moved to these

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<sup>201</sup> Cf. Letter XV of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>202</sup> Cf. Letter of Choe Yang Eop Thomas sent to P. L. Legregeois and a Leading Professor of Seminary on October 11, 1895 (XVII), hereafter this letter will be referred to as Letter XVII.

<sup>203</sup> Cf. Letter VIII of Choe to Legregeois.

sheltered places starting a new life out of nothing: they cleared the barren land, built shelters and houses and formed new Christian communities.

Sometimes the place chosen was not safe, and soon their relatives found them out and began to persecute them. This was especially the case for women. Under Confucian custom, the women of the Yangban class could not easily leave their home. If they were determined to leave their house, they would face a lot of threats and dangerous situations. They had to be prepared to confront and overcome many risks on their journey. For example when a woman of the Yangban class escaped from her family to follow and live her Christian faith, she was forced to be married to a stranger who arrested her during twelve years.<sup>204</sup>

Despite these horrible circumstances, generally the faithful experienced deep consolation in the Christian villages through the ministry of the missionaries. In the Joseon kingdom there were no native clergy since Kim Andreas was martyred, only western missionaries were serving the faithful. But there was the problem of their external appearance by being very distinguishable compared to the people of Joseon. Therefore, they could not go out easily to any place leaving their sheltered sites. For overcoming this problem in order to preach, there are two issues to mention, one is a socio-cultural aspect and the other a language aspect.

The first is the Confucian practice of mourning. In Joseon, anyone who lost a parent had to wear funeral garments which hide all parts of the body, including the face. They had to go around not looking at anybody except on the ground on which they were walking. The Joseon society considered such acts as a form of filial piety towards their ancestors. The descendants should wear these mourning clothes everywhere wherever they went for three full years, quasi like being a great sinner

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<sup>204</sup> Cf. Letter VII of Choe to Legregeois.

repenting for disobedience towards their deceased ancestors. They are also prohibited to attend any social activity during this time. That was why western missionaries could walk on the street and move around in the whole land of Joseon for missionary work with such secret garments.

The second issue was the Korean character for studying catechism. At that time the dominant language in Joseon was written in Chinese characters and also all books of the Joseon church were from China. But the problem was that many faithful coming from the lower class and women could not read and study these books because they did not have the chance to learn the Chinese characters. Their only focus in life was how to make a living and to survive in the society. The result of this was that almost no faithful could use Chinese characters. But thanks to the new version of catechism, which was written in Korean by Choe Thomas, everybody could learn the Catechism easily, even children who were younger than ten could master it. Thus because of these two special aspects, the mission could accomplish its task in the whole country of Joseon even though the church of Joseon had only few missionaries and experienced times of severe persecutions.<sup>205</sup>

In addition to these two facts, the faithful of the Joseon church had a strong desire to grow in faith and to receive the sacraments ardently.<sup>206</sup> Even though there were few priests serving in Joseon church, the Christians were always eager to prepare themselves for and receive the sacrament of baptism and eucharist. For this yearning to grow in faith, Choe Thomas praised God that so many people had

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<sup>205</sup> Cf. Letter VIII of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

received baptism in spite of the adverse and dangerous circumstances, and that the Church of Joseon may have a good harvest in the garden of God.<sup>207</sup>

Choe Thomas was greatly inspired by a devoted lay woman, known for her Christian name Anna. She was of noble birth but was the only Christian in her family. She could not do anything as a Christian and could not receive the sacraments for nineteen years because her parents did not allow her to practice her faith in Christ. At that time, once people were branded as being Christians in the society, they suddenly lost everything and could not continue to live at their place and some even lost their lives. Thus everybody was quite afraid to become a Christian. But this was not the case with Anna. When she heard the news about Choe Thomas passing by her house, she immediately showed and expressed the courage to get in touch with Fr. Choe Thomas's companions in order to meet the priest and lastly she received the sacraments.<sup>208</sup>

There is a particular point to mention regarding the history of persecution in Joseon. At that time nobody could proclaim the good news publicly. Those who were Christians lived in very remote places or pretended in public not to be a Christian. The missionaries could not do anything for the poor believers in the ordinary way.

Normally people were inspired by the news of heroic acts of Christians or by the behavior which showed not to be afraid from all kinds of sufferings, even death. As consequence non-believers became curious and interested in Christianity and looked for Christians who could teach them catechism and then asked the Christian communities to accept them.

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<sup>207</sup> Cf. Letter of Choe Yang Eop Thomas sent to P. L. Legregeois on September 13, 1856 (XII), hereafter this letter will be referred to as Letter XII.

<sup>208</sup> Cf. Letter VII of Choe to Legregeois.

For example, there was a Yangban who was known as Cho. At first, he considered Christianity as being the religion to instigate rebellion. One day he went to the mountain Menghemoki<sup>209</sup> where the Christians lived. When he saw that the Christian village had been destroyed, he felt compassion and sorry for them. To his surprise, the response of the Christians was placid and peaceful as if nothing happened. There was no trace of vengeance or anger coming from the side of the Christians. He could not understand this sort of behavior and so tried to ask them to find out about the reason for this.

The Christians were at first reluctant to tell him about their God, for fear that he might be a spy. But after showing to them his continued passion in order to get to know the truth, the villagers finally were moved and revealed to him that they are Christians. And then they explained to him that they would always depend on God in their life so that they entrusted to him whatever was good and bad, for their God is always good and never failed them. That was why they always praised God, even amidst trials and had the courage to overcome all kind of disasters any time.

After this experience, the Yangban Cho believed that Christianity is the true religion which could overcome everything in this world and he started to learn the catechism together with those Christians and he became a member of their community. After this touching experience, he broke all his ties with his family and desisted from ancestral worship. Choe Thomas baptized him and gave him the Christian name of Paul, as an inspiration to spread the gospel to his entire family and the country even when he was persecuted as a poor Christian.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> This was one of the Christian villages, which is now located in the city of Boeun, Chungcheong province. At that time many martyrs lived there. Cf. Choe, *The Collection of Letters of Choe Yang Eop Thomas*, 87.

<sup>210</sup> Cf. Letter VIII of Choe to Legregeois.

At that time Choe Thomas was confronted with various difficulties whenever he went around in the villages. It took him three or four days to move from one village to another. Besides of this circumstance, there were also wild animals, huge boulders and rough roads on his path. He would also hear confession an average number of 40 to 50 a day. To make matters worse, he should finish all his work only during night and then move to the next village before dawn.<sup>211</sup>

That is why Choe Thomas said that the evangelization and work which he did was only temporary, transient, and secret because the Christians always were in danger to be exterminated by the government and avaricious people. Thus the lifestyle of Christians often became that of a wanderer or a miserable pilgrim. He expressed these desperate circumstances when saying that he could not tolerate it any more without a deep lamentation and sympathy for them.<sup>212</sup>

Even though the situation was very severe and risky, his pastoral zeal for the mission overcame all mentioned difficulties. He took charge of all Christian villages or settlements in the five provinces for six months, as described in the chapter two. This area was almost the same size of present day South Korea. He also administered the sacrament of baptism for roughly 180 adults per year.<sup>213</sup> He walked in the whole country of Joseon solely with his weary foot, being always without proper rest, though at times he used to ride on a horse along the fields. He really dedicated himself for this difficult and special evangelization.<sup>214</sup>

*Sacraments* as a service to the people of God. After his ordination in mainland China, Choe Thomas contemplated and reflected deeper about sacraments, especially

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Cf. Letter XVII of Choe to Legregeois and a Leading Professor of Seminary.

<sup>213</sup> Cf. Letter XII of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>214</sup> Cf. Letter VII of Choe to Legregeois.

the eucharist. The burden of the life of a priest was transformed to the very sweet and inspiring offering by God's abundant grace so that he could offer the mass everyday even when he felt to be incompetent and unworthy. He believed that he received this holy authority from God through his ordination. Only priests could offer the great value of the inestimable mass to the merciful God every day.

After gaining confidence in his ministry to God and the people of God, he was firmly determined as a priest to remember all priests and his faithful companions before God as often as he could until he had fulfilled his mission of promoting the kingdom of God in Joseon.<sup>215</sup>

One day, while ministering in one of the Christian villages, he realized that our Lord Jesus Christ, who triumphed against the evil by the power of the cross, always hid himself in the holy communion for the sake of being close to the lives of his beloved faithful.<sup>216</sup>

After being ordained a priest in China, Choe Thomas administered the sacraments, especially he heard "the confession" for solemnity mass during seven months. He also celebrated the sacrament in the Joseon kingdom to Fr. M.A.N. Daveluy and bishop Jean J. Ferréol who were severely sick. This was the first time to administer these sacraments in his motherland. He felt an intense desire and heavy responsibility regarding the holy sacraments being the only surviving native priest serving there.<sup>217</sup>

The following case is a wonderful story in spite of its dangerous and challenging circumstances. There was a woman who was from a higher social class.

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<sup>215</sup> Cf. Letter VI of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>216</sup> Cf. Letter XIV of Choe to Libois.

<sup>217</sup> Cf. Letter VII of Choe to Legregeois.

One day her husband was going to realize about her faith in Christ and then tried to beat her without mercy. But being a faithful servant of Christ she was never afraid and did even not fear death and was determined to keep her faith even when she would have to die for it. Fortunately, her husband changed his mind on the way to bring her to the police station. This was due partially because of her steadfast faith.

When Choe Thomas celebrated the sacraments for her, her attitude inspired him deeply. She readily received the communion with open heart and enthusiasm. She always waited for the day ardently when she were going to meet a holy priest and hear the word of God through his holy mouth. If God gave her this marvelous grace even once, she could die happily right now. She anticipated this gracious day with tears and sighs every day. Thus she could encounter in Choe Thomas the loving God and received the sacraments with the mercy of God.<sup>218</sup>

In contrast, the life of priests was sometimes not easy even though they had a deep spirituality. Choe Thomas confronted the challenges especially in the land of Joseon. He suffered a lot for ministering the sacraments to the faithful.

For example, sometimes he should have refused to administer the sacrament of baptism to people due to their lack of preparation in catechism. But some faithful got very angry about this and then tried to catch and to hurt him. During his ministry in Joseon he went through many such dangerous situations.<sup>219</sup> Once he went to a Christian village, known as Tsinpattel,<sup>220</sup> where the whole town prepared for the sacrament of baptism and was looking forward eagerly to meet the missionary. After

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<sup>218</sup> Cf. Letter XIII of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. Letter XVII of Choe to Legregeois and a Leading Professor of Seminary.

<sup>220</sup> This Christian village etymologically originated in the meaning of the field from the entrance of village to inside of village. It is now located in the province of the Chungcheong. Cf. Choe, *The Collection of Letters of Choe Yang Eop Thomas*, 249.

he administered the sacrament of penance and reconciliation and the baptism of infants, he prepared for the mass to celebrate the sacrament of baptism for fifteen adults. But the police suddenly surrounded the house where they were in. They tried then to destroy this place and arrested him and his companions applying enormous force. Fortunately, he could be saved thanks to the persistent resistance of his faithful. But the enemies continued to threaten them by destroying houses and everything in them. Thus Choe Thomas could not do anything for them but to ran away to stop these terrible assaults.

Barely escaped from that town in the middle of the night, he could not recognize the direction where he should go for a safe place and he just wandered on the thorny way on bare foot. In that tense situation, he could reach a steep mountain range with the help of God's providence. There were very dangerous circumstances for administering the sacraments. He was always confronted with latent or open threats in his ministry.<sup>221</sup>

*presbyterium* is the community of priests in unity with their bishop. Choe Thomas respected and was part of the hierarchical constitution of the church. He was faithful to the pope as the Vicar of Christ.<sup>222</sup> He mentioned that he would dedicate all his reverence and fidelity to the chief shepherd, the Pope's authority.<sup>223</sup>

He also honored and sometimes criticized a bishop. He entertained good relations with the third bishop Jean J. Ferréol and the forth bishop of St. S. F. Berneux.

He emphasized the virtue of obedience to Bishop Jean Joseph Ferreol when he was an exiled priest in China. He always tried to follow whatever the bishop wanted

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<sup>221</sup> Cf. Letter XII of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>222</sup> Cf. Letter XVII of Choe to Legregeois and a Leading Professor of Seminary.

<sup>223</sup> Cf. Letter I of Choe to Legregeois.

from him. If he did what he planned before entering the land of Joseon, he would have already arrived there or would have become a martyr like Kim Andreas. He only desired to accomplish what God wanted and the monsignor ordered.<sup>224</sup>

But Choe Thomas did not always praise the bishop. Sometimes he criticized the bishop's behavior out of a sense of moral justice. He made an issue about the personal management of Bishop Ferreol to his professor who had the right for sending missionaries to Joseon. He only favored the two acolytes who were from a higher social status. But their behavior were not a good example for the faithful so that many Christians blamed their lifestyle and so many times Choe Thomas made a petition to the bishop that he should replace them for the sake of peace in the community. But the bishop did not accept any suggestion from his believers, even not a recommendation coming from his priest Choe Thomas.<sup>225</sup>

The successor of bishop J. J. Ferreol was bishop S. F. Berneux. Choe Thomas really showed a deep reference to this merciful bishop. When bishop Berneux finally came to the land of Joseon, Choe Thomas was really pleased with joy. And also he praised the infinite and generous mercy of God for the pitiable Joseon Christians.<sup>226</sup>

Bishop Berneux really was always close to the faithful, friendly and devoted to the mission of Joseon with a huge amount of work. Thus many Christians followed his advice and loved him. Choe Thomas felt sorry for him for accepting more and more work even when Bishop Berneux was sick.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Cf. Letter VI of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>225</sup> Cf. Letter XIV of Choe to Libois.

<sup>226</sup> Cf. Letter XII of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>227</sup> Cf. Letter XIV of Choe to Libois.

Choe Thomas was always worried about Bishop Berneux' health. One day the bishop was in a critical physical condition due to over exertion and intense pastoral concern for his sheep. Choe Thomas asked God to stay beside him always. Even though the sins of the Joseon community were too grave and could not be forgiven, God should not take away the bishop's life through his infinitive mercy. In an even more demanding tone he requested from God that rather he want to die instead of S. F. Berneux if possible.<sup>228</sup>

Choe Thomas really loved and respected his companions who were professors and missionaries in Joseon. They were all priests, committed to preach the Gospel and to establish the Catholic Church. He liked them for their virtues and their dedication to the Christian community of Joseon. If these foreigners would be willing to dedicate their whole lives and were even willing to die for Christ and for the Joseon Church, what more can a Joseon native do? That is why, despite the many difficulties he had encountered during his years as a seminarian in Macau, he persevered and bore all difficulties with patience, because they were nothing compared to the difficulties of those missionaries and the great sufferings of the Joseon Christians in general.

Choe Thomas continued to maintain a very close and fraternal relationship with Fr. P. L. Legregeois. He always wanted to learn from his sincerity and honest heart even when his dear professor was far away from him<sup>229</sup> He also felt deep compassion for his companions. He was very friendly with Fr. Feron in the mission. Choe Thomas often went to his pastoral place to comfort him in loneliness and to share his friendship with two times. They shared and developed their fraternal love in God. In that way they experienced a great consolation and could bear the harsh

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<sup>228</sup> Cf. Letter XV of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>229</sup> Cf. Letter II of Choe to Legregeois.

missionary life.<sup>230</sup> When Fr. Barran passed away, Choe Thomas asked him to become a protector of the poor mission field in heaven before the Lord.<sup>231</sup>

### C. The Love of God

Choe Thomas quoted the Gospel that “I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (John 17: 23) This verse emphasizes the unity and intimate relationship between a priestly soul and God in order to realize the essential goal of a priest: selfless service. All priests, (and all Christians) must be connected with God and among themselves in his love. And it is only then that we can say that we have witnessed to the kingdom of God which was our ultimate hope. Thus he exhorted all Christians to do only what God wants. *“If we could follow and accept God’s will, our work will always succeed in his love even though we seem to fail. Through this love our spirituality would grow more and more”*.<sup>232</sup>

Once when some secret messengers were supposed to go to Shanghai to fetch Bishop S. F. Berneux and his companions, but were unable to make contact with anyone, they returned empty handed. Choe Thomas worried about their safety and prayed earnestly so that they were all well and would be able to return to the mission safely through God’s love. He emphasized that he always entrusted his work to God and his merciful grace and attributed the success of the mission to God’s benevolence,

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<sup>230</sup> Cf. Letter XIII of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>231</sup> Cf. Letter XII of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>232</sup> Letter VI of Choe to Legregeois.

For example when he reported that he was able to administer to 240 adults the sacrament of baptism, he happily shared it with his formators.<sup>233</sup>

Choe Thomas also wrote that he would receive any grace he needed whenever he asked God for them from the depths of his heart and for the good of the Church of Joseon. Thus, to gain the love and mercy of God was far better than anything else for him and his Christians. He also asked Fr. Legregeois to remember him and the needs of the poor people.<sup>234</sup>

Since he had always praised the Lord in any given situation, he likewise stressed that the people should accept whatever happened in their lives, even if they were confronted with misfortune because God will always give good things without any exception. Thus we should put ourselves into God's hands and providence.

The love of God sometimes gives us good and sometimes bad things. The welcome news of bishop's (S. F. Berneux) arrival together with two new missionaries brought great joy to Joseon's Christianity and helped them to overcome the sadness and grief we experienced with the death of Bishop Ferreol last year at that time.<sup>235</sup> And he also praised God's incomprehensible benevolence and providence. Jeju island was located in a very remote and desolate corner away from the main land of Joseon due to the difficult transportation situation at that time unlike nowadays. Thus nobody expected that the residents would experience the grace of God of being preached by Kim Gi Ryoung Felix Peter who was taught by Choe Thomas.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Cf. Letter XI of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>234</sup> Cf. Letter XII of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>235</sup> Cf. Letter XV of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>236</sup> Cf. Letter of Choe Yang Eop Thomas sent to N. Libois on October 4, 1858 (XVI).

On the other hand, what God bestows, God can also take away. The Christian community experienced this with the death of the missionary Fr. Joseph Ambroise Maistre. God took him away from his beloved faithful after living with them for only four years. He endured all kind of difficult situations when he worked as missionary in the desert place serving extremely poor faithful. All of Joseon's Christians loved him because of his friendly and sacrificing personality for his poor sheep and he always let people experience a welcoming and friendly hospitality. When he died, the people could not stop their laments and mourning. But this sadness did not leave them only with grief, but also with a sense of discipline of the mind and it made them more thankful and humble in God. They became more mature after enduring the anguish of heart through God's providence<sup>237</sup>.

God revealed his power and glory through the witnessing of the many Joseon martyrs when God seemed to have abandoned the mission with so much suffering, desolation, and even death. The Christians persevered in God's love and thus many were proclaimed "venerable" and were eventually canonized by the Universal Church<sup>238</sup>. One wish of Choe Thomas was that God would continue to love Joseon and the universal church through the fruits of fidelity of Joseon.<sup>239</sup>

*Prayer.* Choe Thomas emphasized the importance of persevering in prayer following the example of saints. But how long should the faithful pray to receive God's answer, especially regarding the repentance of a sinner or receiving extraordinary grace? The Saints prayed unceasingly with an ardent and humble attitude. This pious practice was combined with the signs of heavy sacrifice and self-

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<sup>237</sup> Cf. Letter XV of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>238</sup> This is discussed in the Martyrdom during the Gihae and Bungo persecution in September 23, 1857. Cf. Choe, *The Collection of Letters of Choe Yang Eop Thomas*, 177.

<sup>239</sup> Cf. Letter XVII of Choe to Legregeois and a Leading Professor of Seminary.

denial. It might take ten years, twenty years, thirty years, forty years, or more; or even a lifetime. But what matters most is that Christians dedicate themselves to God through a lifetime of prayer.<sup>240</sup>

Choe Thomas was himself a model of such Christian prayer. He always tried to pray to God, to Jesus Christ, to mother Mary ever Virgin, and to all the saints when facing dangers and other difficult situations. In all his correspondence to his formators and professors, he never failed to humbly ask them for their prayers, not only for himself but also for the Christians he served. In fact, almost all of his writings, especially his mentioned letters, can be read as a form of prayer.<sup>241</sup> This reflects the fact that he was not only prayerful, but he really believed in the power of prayer to alleviate the sufferings of the Joseon Church. In doing so, he continued his request that God would generously help and support to overcome all miserable circumstances in good faith.<sup>242</sup>

During his fourth trip, Choe Thomas and his companions sailed towards the Backryeong island in spite of terrible weather conditions. They were suddenly confronted with strong waves in the middle of the sea, and the ship's ropes broke and its anchor got lost. Even the captain was afraid that the ship would suffer shipwreck and bring death to all passengers. Fortunately, the ship arrived at one of the islands. But they could not disembark because the Joseon government strictly prohibited any

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<sup>240</sup> Cf. Letter VI of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>241</sup> One can and see the examples in the following Letter III of Choe to Legregeois, Letter IV of Choe to Legregeois, Letter VI of Choe to Legregeois, Letter VIII of Choe to Legregeois, Letter X of Choe to Libois, Letter XI of Choe to Legregeois, Letter XII of Choe to Legregeois, Letter XIII of Choe to Legregeois, Letter XV of Choe to Legregeois, Letter XVII of Choe to Legregeois and a Leading Professor of Seminary, Letter of Choe Yang Eop Thomas sent to N. Libois on October 12, 1859 (XVIII), hereafter this letter will be referred to as Letter XVIII, and the Letter of Choe Yang Eop Thomas sent to N. Libois and P. L. Legregeois on September 3, 1860 (XIX), hereafter this letter will be referred to as Letter XIX.

<sup>242</sup> Cf. Letter XIV of Choe to Libois and Letter XVII of Choe to Legregeois and a Leading Professor of Seminary.

contact with foreigners. Thus the residents of the island did not allow them to do so, nor could any help be expected from them. The people on the ship could not do anything except to pray. They ardently prayed to God and the Virgin, as well as all the saints so that they might be saved from this dangerous place. With total trust in God's providence, they were able to do so without loss of lives and property.<sup>243</sup>

During his pastoral ministry, Choe Thomas was confronted with many such dangerous situations and he himself testified that he could not have survived without prayer. Once there were three women living in the small village together with their families and husbands, who were non-believers. Choe Thomas tried to visit them late in the evening in order to celebrate mass with them together with his altar boy and companion. But the villagers thought that he might be a foreigner (as all missionaries then were) and accused him before the village chieftain so he was in danger to be killed. Choe Thomas really thought that this time, he would not be able to escape from the hands of his enemies. And even if he were able to flee from their detention, they would eventually catch up and kill him as well as his hosts who were innocent. He could not do anything but to pray for his life to the Immaculate Conception (patron saint of Joseon with St. Joseph on August 22, 1841 by Gregory XVI)<sup>244</sup> and he placed himself fully into God's hand. After praying, he was filled with boldness and did not feel any fear about death or anything. Miraculously, his enemies could not agree on how to solve the problem, and he was able to escape and leave the village. He was thus saved from death through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Cf. Letter VI of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>244</sup> Cf. Gu Man Jo, *the materials for celebrating the May* (Seoul: Seoul Diocese, 2011), 5.

<sup>245</sup> Cf. Letter VII of Choe to Legregeois.

At the height of these persecutions, many Christians gave up their faith even though they realized deep within their hearts that Christianity was the true religion and they continued to seek salvation; but they did not have enough courage and strength in this situation to give witness of their faith publicly and openly. They only waited for the chance when they could live as Christians in religious freedom. Thus he prayed for them and for their perseverance with the following words: “*O almighty, most merciful Lord, have mercy on us. You who can make all things stronger yet sweeter for our salvation, deign to be merciful to us!*”

Finally he solicited from his professor, N. Libois, to pray for him continuously and he requested also his promise to remember him in his intention when Fr. Libois celebrates the eucharist. In return Choe Thomas would also pray for his professors whenever he celebrated daily mass. Added to his Eucharistic devotion of celebrating mass, he is also remembered to pray with great fervor whenever he received holy communion, as a prolongation of his eucharistic sacrifice. He also practiced the pious devotion of spiritual communion when he could not celebrate mass.<sup>246</sup>

*Contemplation.* When discussing about the contemplative prayer of Choe Thomas, I am reminded of the story when he had just finished his Philosophical studies in Macau. He was waiting for the ship which was supposed to bring him to his homeland and we can imagine his homesickness, coupled with his pastoral zeal to serve soon his native people. It caused him great suffering when he had to wait for days for the ship to arrive in Macau. But when the ship finally came, only one passenger could go onto the ship. And it was not him but his companion, St. Kim Andreas. Choe Thomas himself described his feelings at that moment expressing that

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<sup>246</sup> The devotion of Holy Communion was widespread among the French school of spirituality especially the practice of spiritual communion in a time when daily communion was not allowed. Cf. Letter XVIII of Choe to Libois.

he tried to contemplate in God and be united with Him to overcome this terrible loneliness and desolation in that situation. Left back alone in Macau, he silently meditated on his own vocation and mission and the future of Joseon. He said that “he really wanted to be alone, in the small space to be united with God.” And then he eagerly begged our Lord Jesus Christ; “*O Lord, do not abandon our miserable people, but remember ‘your holy blood’ shed for the salvation of the whole world, though your missionaries do not deserve to proclaim the good news.*”<sup>247</sup>

*Suffering.* The fate of missionaries of Joseon can be characterized as that of suffering and agony due to the violent persecutions. Before entering Joseon, the missionaries had to make a very long voyage across continents. They were totally exhausted and many were weakened by illnesses. For example, Fr. F. Jansou fell ill while on a voyage. Sadly he passed away shortly after he had arrived in Joseon.<sup>248</sup>

Although he was a Joseon native, Choe Thomas too experienced the same suffering like the foreign missionaries. Sensitive and at the same time zealous for winning souls, he too wanted to endure all his sufferings for the sake of success of his mission. Having placed his entire life into God’s hand, God become his life’s sole comforter, only hope and the very meaning of his existence in the world.<sup>249</sup> Likewise, our hero also wanted to participate in the tremendous suffering of all missionaries and voluntarily offered himself united with the passion of Christ to participate in the kingdom of God.<sup>250</sup>

During his years of active ministry, Choe Thomas would always bring a weapon for self-defense, since he was afraid of being attacked or ambushed by non-

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<sup>247</sup> Letter I of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>248</sup> Cf. Letter X of Choe to Libois.

<sup>249</sup> Cf. Letter I of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>250</sup> Cf. Letter II of Choe to Legregeois.

believers or unwelcoming and hostile villagers.<sup>251</sup> Once when he was visiting one of the small villages, the village chief, who was a non-Christian, became aware who he was and went to the place where he stayed. There, Choe Thomas was abused verbally and physically and suffered violence until the middle of the night. Fortunately, the village chief himself got so tired of his abuse so that he went back home to sleep. This allowed Choe Thomas, to escape from that house and village in the dread of the night.<sup>252</sup>

At the end of his work, Choe Thomas confessed that many times, he was too weak to make the journey alone. But he felt obliged to visit the Christian villages where the foreign missionaries could not reach. As result, he annually had to walk over 2,750 kilometers and took care of five provinces serving about 100 Christian villages. When he planned to take rest for some months, he could not find a proper place to do so. One day he went to Angok<sup>253</sup> to spend his holidays. But he had to leave immediately because a member of the Yangban began to persecute him and tried to extort money from this community.<sup>254</sup>

Throughout his life, Choe Thomas lived under the risk of being arrested and always in the danger of facing death. During the Kyungsin persecution, he took refuge in a lonely spot of the Joseon Dynasty and he could not stay in contact with any Christians. Enduring plenty sufferings he prayed for his miserable faithful.

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<sup>251</sup> Cf. Letter XVII of Choe to Legregeois and a Leading Professor of Seminary.

<sup>252</sup> Cf. Letter VII of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>253</sup> This Christian village is now located in the province of Chungcheong. Choe Thomas' seventeenth and eighteenth letters were sent from this place. This region was under the pastoral care of Fr. S. Feron. The name of the place etymologically meant the inside from the valley of the main village. Cf. Choe, *The Collection of Letters of Choe Yang Eop Thomas*, 241-243.

<sup>254</sup> Cf. Letter XVIII of Choe to Libois.

“O Lord, have mercy on me. Do not forget your abundant mercy on your faithful in distress. For they only depend on your mercy which is their only hope. O Lord, hear my voice. Do not punish your poor believers even though they are filled with sin. If you should mark our guilt, who would survive? But there is forgiveness with you by the prayer of all of saints, so that you may be worshipped and revered. For you redeem us from all its iniquities and persecution. Otherwise we will not find any hope and meaning of life in our future.”<sup>255</sup>

#### **D. The Love of the Neighbor**

*Compassion* for the neighbor. Choe Thomas experienced with bitter lamentation and weeping as he patiently waited for the very day when he would meet the poor Christians of Joseon. During the religious persecutions in his homeland, he and his family suffered together with the rest of the Christian community even though he might be in Macau or in China. He sometimes felt a great pressure since he was not able to enter the country directly but to seek a way around it in order to return.<sup>256</sup> He always prayed to God, offering his only one wish to serve his people. His zeal for loving his neighbors was so great that upon entering his home country, he did not stop serving the people of God until he died of over-exertion.<sup>257</sup>

During his many attempts to enter Joseon, the main reason of his worries were the Christians who risked their lives for waiting for him. During his failed third trip, (that is through Gogunsan Island), the Christians continued to wait for him for more than six months since they heard that Commander La Pierre would come back again with him within the year.

They prepared everything to welcome him even amidst this highly dangerous situation. But he could not get any chance to return nor to send a word that he cannot

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<sup>255</sup> Letter XIX of Choe to Libois and Legregeois.

<sup>256</sup> Cf. Letter III of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>257</sup> Cf. Letter II of Choe to Legregeois.

arrive yet. Thus he was really worried that they might be arrested by the police and a new cruel persecution might be offset and begin.

In a similar way after failing on the fourth trip (Backlung Island), he again became worried about the fact that the Joseon government might seek to take revenge on the Christians since the government believed that the Christians were the ones who called the French warships.<sup>258</sup> Until those times, the Joseon government could not persecute the Christians actively for the high officers and king were afraid of them.<sup>259</sup>

Two years had already been passed since commander La Pierre made a promise in his official letter that he must return to Joseon. Until that day he did not come back again and the French did not take any drastic measure in favor of the Christians and against the Joseon' government. The officials of this government would underestimate the French government. They might have thought of taking advantage of this opportunity to exterminate all the faithful Christians. It means that the Christians could be a falling victim for political act of retaliation. Choe Thomas' heart was broken because of this situation.<sup>260</sup>

Choe Thomas deplored that Christians suffer a lot from the social structure injustice and natural calamity. The Joseon society was in crisis as diverse members of the society were quarreling among themselves. Choe Thomas mentioned that the main social problem was due to the exploitation of the weak by the strong, and he harshly

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<sup>258</sup> It should be remembered that during this time, the French Commander Cecile threatened Joseon with three warships and a formal letter of complaint for the killing of three French missionaries. A year later, Commander La Pierre came to Joseon in the place of Cecile (and as mentioned by Cecile) to seek and implement justice. His appearance made the Joseon government think that the French government had been using the missionaries and Choe Thomas. Cf. Letter of Kim Tae Gon Andreas sent to Jean J. Ferréol on August 26, 1846; see also the third trip described in the second chapter.

<sup>259</sup> Cf. Letter VI of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

criticized the ongoing political infighting among government officials and the abuse of the poor and weak in the society.

Bribery was practiced rampantly and officials could not seek further resources than to rid off the properties of the weak and the poor for replenishing themselves with their money which they gave again to higher officers to become promoted. For example, a lower officer would give a bribe to his senior officer for promotion. That was why they continued to exploit the ordinary people's property. In the persecution atmosphere one can easily imagine the situation of the Christians which could certainly be considered to be worse than the situation of the poor. In addition to this exploitation, there was a terrible disaster in the whole land of Joseon in 1853. Many people were going to die due to famine. Christians would suffer more than all the other people.<sup>261</sup>

*Pastoral charity.* After becoming a priest, Choe Thomas began to minister to the Christian villages. He took care for the poor, needy and hungry faithful who were all in a miserable situation. His heart was broken since he could not do anything to help them. He blamed the situation of persecution which took away any freedom from the Christians which they might have enjoyed otherwise, at least the very basic human rights. He was extremely in sympathy for his pitiful Christians.<sup>262</sup>

During the year of bad harvest, their lives began to be more tragic than the life of ordinary people. For example, after the Gihae persecution, many believers died due to hunger and the cold. This situation was too miserable to look at. Even when this had taken place already ten years ago, its effect continued to influence the lives of the

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<sup>261</sup> Cf. Letter of Choe Yang Eop Thomas sent to His Professor in Macau on October 23, 1853 (IX).

<sup>262</sup> Cf. Letter VII of Choe to Legregeois.

people, and the misery remained the same. His heart would always be torn apart with anguish after visiting these villages.<sup>263</sup>

Choe Thomas felt great mercy and compassion towards Joseon seminarians whom he chose before, because He himself experienced to live abroad for 13 years. He knew very well that the life in a foreign country was very difficult for any person especially for a candidate to the priesthood. Choe Thomas was asked to choose three devout men from Joseon to receive formation in Penang. He not only was concerned for their welcome, caring to know if they arrived safely and sound, but he also wished that the Rector of the Penang Seminary would get to know well the characters of the candidates, their strengths as well as their weaknesses, so that they would adept well to the place and new circumstances. He was especially anxious about Kim John who showed to have good talents but was rather unstable in his vocation. He earnestly hoped that his personality would be corrected as soon as possible by his formators.<sup>264</sup>

Choe Thomas showed his compassion for the righteous Christians who endured severe tortures for God. Among them were five who were especially close to his heart, including two catechists in one of the Christian villages. One day, after mass, they were taken away by the police, where they were tortured with unimaginable methods. A chief police said that “you should curse to your God if you want to survive.” They resolutely overcame this temptation and responded that “it will be a sin to blame the king of this world, to say nothing of God who created this world and who dominates all things of this world eternally. So I cannot do an unpardonable and deadly sin even when I die in front of your eyes.” After an almost deadly torturing, they went and sent into a prison. They had to prepare food by themselves upon

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<sup>263</sup> Cf. Letter VIII of Choe to Legregeois.

<sup>264</sup> Cf. Letter X of Choe to Libois.

receiving these terrible body torture for nobody wanted to serve them. Who could serve these pitiful believers in these situation? Who could break the majesty will in such a time of severe persecution? Choe Thomas cried deeply in his heart because he also could not do anything on behalf of these miserable faithful.<sup>265</sup>

In one of the Christian villages, there were some Christian women who devoutly practiced their faith, without the knowledge of their husbands and their parents. One day, one of these women began to talk openly about the mass and the graces which can be received when joining the Catholic Church. She did this without realizing that this was dangerous to do for Christians when living among non-believers. Her news spread immediately and it was a question of time when the Christians would be persecuted by other villagers. For this reason, the Christian family, where the mass was usually said, was driven out of this village. The residents of this village plundered immediately all their property and expelled them from that place. From now on, the village could not experience liturgies or prayers any more even in secret and the Christians could not practice their faith. This situation pained Choe Thomas very much; and he could only exclaim: *“O Lord, have mercy on your pitiful family and give these women the fullness of your grace!”*

Choe Thomas also sympathized with a small group of secret Christians living in a pagan village. The Christians there had been waiting for a visit of a priest for almost two years and their only hope in life was to be visited by a priest. When Choe Thomas finally went there to visit them one evening, the Christians were looking forward to meet him but the non-believers thought that he might be a missionary and they immediately tried to arrest and kill him. But a wise Christian intervened and persuaded them not to continue their plan and search. When the villagers stopped their

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<sup>265</sup> Letter XII of Choe to Legregeois.

search to find Choe Thomas, this was the only chance for him to escape before dawn without help from anyone else. Even although he himself was saved, the poor Christians continued to remain there without any sacrament or help by a spiritual guide. But he as priest could not do more than what he had done and tried to do.<sup>266</sup>

Another persecution broke out in 1860 (Kyungsin). Although only a few people were arrested, all the Christians in the kingdom were driven out from their villages and then their neighbors and relatives snatched the property of the Christians. They were left with nothing even not with their daily necessities. All of a sudden many of them lost everything and they began to live a wretched life in extreme poverty. They could not expect or get any help from any other person from anywhere, for fear that those might be also accused of being Christians. Most of them were just wandering on the streets like vagabonds. The police destroyed any village where Christians might have lived. That is why many non-believers were afraid of sharing their fate with Christian neighbors and they threw them out of their villages. This also was the reason why non-believers would not even want to have them in their villages nor to help them in times of need.

To make matters worse, the government tried to eradicate Christianity totally from Joseon. Many Christians, under threats of death or corporal punishment, readily abandoned their faith, especially the widows and the young maidens. But on the other hand, we also see many heroic examples of Christians who kept their faith courageously. Among them, we ought to mention a certain virgin named Agatha. Because of the persecution, she was left alone when her father and brother were arrested for their faith. She fled to the place where Choe Thomas was hiding, hoping that he could help her. But the poor priest was also helpless in this persecution and

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<sup>266</sup> Letter XIII of Choe to Legregeois.

could only tell her to hide in a cave, rather than to die a violent death. In following his advice, she could at least somehow experience God's providence in her difficult life.<sup>267</sup>

*Zeal for souls.* Choe Thomas showed always a great zeal for the salvation of souls. During the third trip, the fleet "La Gloria" was damaged and was anchored at the Gogunsan island. He was able to get in contact with some islanders and inquired about the Christians in Joseon. His main reason was to establish some contacts and find means to reach these villages and to visit the Christians. At that same time he also wanted to get to know more about the severe situation of persecution. Initially he talked to the Fleet commander about his desire to stay since it was only a question of a short distance and actually he was already on his homeland. But this commander did not allow him to stay and forced him to return with them to China. This answer of the Commander broke the heart of Choe Thomas and unknowingly tears ran down his cheeks. But he had no choice left but to bear everything patiently. Even this desperate situation, he could not give up his desire to return to Joseon and to save souls.<sup>268</sup>

When he could not reach to Joseon in spite of attempting it for four times, he never gave up his hope of seeing his sheep to save the souls in his motherland. On his fifth trip, he could not prepare many things for a successful journey and he presumed that it seemed to be almost hopeless to pass the Uiju border of Joseon.

But he wanted to follow the footsteps of his loving faithful ancestors, especially his own saintly parents and Kim Andreas. And he always felt an inner conviction through contemplation and his strong faith. In addition to this it was his conviction that the real Christians should find hope in God even in despair. He clearly

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<sup>267</sup> Cf. Letter XIX of Choe to Libois and Legregeois.

<sup>268</sup> Cf. Letter V of Choe to Legregeois.

mentioned that even when we are weak in God, we will be strong as much as God's mercy. Through this great faith and ardent desire to enter Joseon, he finally could set his foot on the Joseon land passing through the Uiju border.

*The miracle.* Until that time, no one of the missionaries intended to enter Joseon through this entrance because they knew that the government officials were waiting for them, especially for the two Joseon subjects who went to Macau to be formed by foreign missionaries.<sup>269</sup> But surprisingly Choe Thomas did not disguise himself but passed the gate with his companions like ordinary travelers.

He was not afraid of any consequences because he resolutely wanted to follow his ancestors in God, and if at this time he would be arrested and killed, he would do so happily, at least, because he was back in his beloved Joseon. In addition to this he did not want to delay his journey anymore for he might have thought that he could not get any other chances in the future. The only way was to pray to God when he approached the post; "I totally entrust to you all things with all expectation and hope." He walked in the middle of the road towards the Uiju border with the risk of being arrested. It was indeed a wonder, because normally the officers would check everything, but on that day, and without any reason, they were not able to recognize them. Thus with God's grace and mercy, Choe Thomas and his companions were able to arrive in Hanyang safely which no one had imagined and expected to realize. Again the deep faith of Choe Thomas proved to be stronger than all adverse circumstances.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Cf. Letter of Kim Tae Gon Andreas sent to N. Libois of March 3, 1845.

<sup>270</sup> Cf. Letter VII of Choe to Legregeois.

## CONCLUSION

One dominant idea of our contemporary society is Neo-liberal capitalism which only forces on the maximizing of asset value, this means that only money has value. This pervading idea has re-structured all social values and dehumanized them. All kinds of human processes and relationships revolve only for the sake of commercial gain. Such an idea increases materialism more and more. In addition to this, the world faces many emerging economies and the impact of globalization. The “utility value” of all things seems to be more powerful and stronger than its intrinsic value. If humanity only emphasizes what is material or useful, then people lose to stay in touch with the spiritual dimension of life and man’s true worth, this consequently brings tremendous problems for people themselves and societies.

As part of the human society, the Church is also greatly affected by these trends, especially regarding the negative impact of these developments on its own members. This becomes a real problem especially among the clergy since they are seen as leaders of the communities when they lose their identity and the meaning of their ministry. In a way, it is one of the root causes of the many problems of the Church today in many countries. Added to this problem is the declining number of men who feel called and are qualified to become priests. In recent years we have also seen how the image of the priest had been tainted with many scandals from sexual nature, internal struggles for power and personal gain and obsession for money and other material things. One of the ways how the Church has been addressing these challenges today in order to give proper witness to the coming of the kingdom of God is the renewal of the priestly spirituality.

The researcher strongly believes that Choe Thomas' priestly spirituality can contribute greatly towards the deepening and strengthening of the priestly spirituality today in view of the renewal of the Church.

Choe Thomas basically rooted his priestly identity on Jesus Christ who is the fountain and source of power of the entire priesthood and all the virtues and the mission of the Christian priesthood. He could maintain a deep and intimate relationship with Christ in order to strive to become holy. After identifying himself with Christ, the High Priest, he was able to understand the mission of the Joseon church and evangelized the whole land of Joseon with the gladness of his heart. He joyfully celebrated all the sacraments in the unity of the community of priests and in spite of the situation of a terrible persecution. To achieve his great pastoral ministry, he always practiced the life of virtue of Christ, especially the love of God and the love of the neighbor through prayer and persevering in all kinds of suffering and he kept serving his faithful in pastoral charity, and with great zeal for the salvation of souls.

Choe Thomas indeed is an extraordinary model for all priests. Aside from his great role in laying down the foundation of Christianity in Joseon, he dedicated his entire life to his flock for twelve years, caring and ceaselessly working dedicated for the promotion of faith until the sudden moment of encountering death on the street due to exhaustion.

Unlike his confrere St. Kim Andreas and many MEP priests who were martyred for the Christian faith, Choe Thomas was a confessor, but this fact does not make him less relevant compared to his martyr companions. As a true priest of God, he stayed by his flock in spite of so much challenges and suffering. He worked tirelessly though the results may be limited due to great difficulties in time of persecution. But despite these circumstances, he tried to do his best to witness God's mercy to his flock. That is why,

aside from the many Korean martyrs, he is duly venerated and highly respected by the church and many priests and is considered to be a true saint and hero of the Korea Church. He was a virtuous and holy priest, a great missionary in the times of severe persecution. He is truly a pillar of the Church in Korea and all Korean Christians owe a lot to him. Also the universal Church can and should learn through his teaching and his exemplary saintly priestly life.

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