

Philiphê Bình and the Catholic Geographies of Tonkin

Philiphê Bình, who would later also style himself as Felipe do Rosario, introduced himself to an imagined future reader in the preface to his notebook of miscellany, *Sách sổ sang chép các việc* (Notebook that transmits and records all matters):

I am the priest Philiphê Bình, of the province of Hải Dương, prefecture of Hạ Hồng, district of Vĩnh Lại, village of Ngải Am, hamlet of Địa Linh. I was born in the year 1759, the same year that King Jose of the country Portugal destroyed the Order of the Virtuous Lord Jesus in his realm. When I reached the age of seventeen in the year 1775 and entered my teacher's home, the order had already been destroyed two years previously in Rome, because the Virtuous Pope Clemente XIV disbanded the Order of the Virtuous Lord Jesus on the 22nd of July in the year 1773. However, prior to disbanding the order, and at the beginning of that year, eight members of the order arrived in Annam: Master Tito and Master Bảo Lộc [Paul] had gone to Quảng [Nam], and the rest of the missionaries, Masters Ni, Thiện, Phan, Luis, and Cấn traveled to Đàng Ngoài ["Tonkin"]. Thus, in that year [1775], I went with Master Luis and left my home.¹

This brief introduction precisely situates Bình in a particular place and at a distinct moment in time, while also foreshadowing the complex trajectory his life would eventually take. It is noteworthy for how Bình positions himself geographically both locally and globally. He begins by describing the location of his home village, using a standard Vietnamese formulation that proceeds from the province through lower levels of administrative organization all the way down to the hamlet. He then shifts registers from a localized Vietnamese geographical articulation to a globalized one, one that speaks to the new geographical realities of his Catholic community. He writes of Portugal—his community's point of

origin—and of Rome, the center of global Catholic authority but also the locale from which the order to disband the Jesuits emerged. Binh also refers to the larger Vietnamese context in which Vietnamese Catholics and European missionaries lived and worshipped—the land of Quang (Cochinchina) and the northern region of Đàng Ngoài (Tonkin) in which he lived.

From this introduction, we learn that Binh was a native of Hải Dương, which lay to the southeast of Thăng Long (present-day Hà Nội) and was part of the coastal region drained by the Red River and its branches. A network of canals and rivers crisscrossed his home district of Vĩnh Lại, which lay directly on the coast.² While otherwise unremarkable, Binh's home village of Ngải Am did merit mention in nineteenth-century geographical texts as the site of a temple dedicated to a thirteenth-century Chinese empress dowager, famous for having committed suicide by drowning rather than risk capture by pursuing Mongol troops. Her spirit later manifested itself in Ngải Am, and several miracles were attributed to it, prompting locals to erect the temple.³

Binh's hamlet itself was fairly ordinary, but the larger prefecture in which it was situated had a certain historical reputation. According to Phan Huy Chú's early nineteenth-century gazetteer, the *Hoàng Việt địa dư chí* (Geographical records of the imperial Việt), Hạ Hồng prefecture was noted for its production of upright Confucian scholars.⁴ Binh's home district of Vĩnh Lại made two notable contributions to their ranks. One of these, Đào Công Chính, was a child prodigy who passed the local civil service examination at the age of thirteen, the *tiến sĩ* (presented scholar) examination in 1661 at the age of twenty-three, and later served on an embassy to China.⁵ The other was one of the most famous Vietnamese scholar-officials of the premodern period, Nguyễn Bình Khiêm (1491–1585), a man whom Keith Taylor has described as the “moral center” of sixteenth-century Đại Việt.⁶ Khiêm first served the Lê dynasty and then, when it was overthrown in 1527 by the Mạc family, agreed to serve the new rulers. After several years of service to the new dynasty, Khiêm retired to his home village, where he spent most of his time composing poetry.⁷ After his death, a temple to Khiêm's memory was erected in Vĩnh Lại. This temple has been refurbished numerous times during the succeeding centuries and is today a popular tourist destination. Indeed, it is probably the only real tourist attraction in this small corner of Vietnam.⁸

Although it produced a few notable scholars, the region was primarily known for its agriculture, as the land was well watered by its numerous rivers, which deposited rich topsoil along their courses. Sericulture was particularly important, with many households involved in raising silkworms and selling their cocoons. Many families also cultivated areca palm, cotton, and water-pipe tobacco, as an early nineteenth-century gazetteer records.⁹ Today residents continue to produce tobacco, which can be seen along the roadsides during the harvest season spread out on drying racks, smoldering fires lit under them to speed the curing process.



MAP 3. Map showing the locations of important sites of Catholic communities and churches in coastal Tonkin. It also shows the dividing line between the Eastern and Western Vicariates of Tonkin as of 1678.

These tobacco crops are alternated with paddy rice production as the seasons change, offering the area some measure of crop diversification. These practices are probably not greatly altered from the late eighteenth century, and Binh undoubtedly witnessed the rituals of tobacco drying and rice transplanting during his early childhood years.

Vĩnh Lại was also very close to the sea, to which it was connected by a wide river, and given its coastal location it was among the sites to which Roman Catholicism spread in the early years of the mission. Many of the early Portuguese Jesuit missionaries landed along this section of Tonkin's coast, which stretched southward from the modern city of Hải Phòng. The coastal denizens, poor farmers, but especially those practicing maritime occupations such as fishing and trading, became the primary targets of conversion efforts.¹⁰ During the seventeenth century this region of Tonkin became a stronghold of Vietnamese Catholicism, and the coastal landscape quickly became dotted with modest wooden churches, religious houses, and schools. The European missionaries took advantage of the easy travel afforded by the region's many rivers to spread their message and subsequently to minister to scattered communities, many of whom did not have their own permanent clergy.

The arrival of these Portuguese Jesuit missionary priests in Tonkin had been an outgrowth of the order's very successful evangelizing project in Japan, initiated by Francis Xavier in the 1540s. This Jesuit mission to Japan had been dominated by Portuguese priests (later joined by smaller numbers of Spaniards), but when the Japanese ruler abruptly cracked down on the new religion and its adherents in the 1590s these missionaries were forced to look elsewhere in Asia to continue their mission. They turned their sights to the still largely unexplored lands of Đại Việt. For logistical reasons these first Vietnamese Portuguese missions were formally carried out under the auspices of the Jesuit "Province of Japan," and it was to this existing ecclesiastical territory that the newly opened Vietnamese church territories were appended.¹¹ Consequently, the earliest Vietnamese Catholics, guided by Portuguese Jesuit priests, found themselves classified as an annex to the distant and culturally dissimilar Japanese Province, evidence of the peculiarities of Catholic ecclesiastical geographies that would persist in the following centuries. For Vietnamese converts, however, it was not this Japanese connection but the one to Portugal, the homeland of their new priests, that was significant. Indeed, the Portuguese connection led many Vietnamese to refer to the newly introduced religion as "Đạo Hoa Lang"—the Way of the Portuguese, a label that survived the subsequent national diversification of the mission field.¹²

Although it did not have the initial success enjoyed by the Jesuit ventures in the southern Vietnamese territory of Cochinchina, the mission to Tonkin slowly took root after some hesitation on the part of the Trịnh rulers, seigniorial lords who controlled a kingdom nominally ruled by the Lê dynasty. By 1626 the first priests were permitted to reside in the capital Thăng Long.¹³ The Jesuits' primary

successes, however, lay in the coastal regions, which provided both easier access by boat and relatively safe distance from potentially hostile authorities at the more inland capital. In these areas, and particularly the stretch between what are today the cities of Hải Phòng and Thanh Hoá, Jesuit missionaries established communities of Catholics. Estimates for the number of early converts vary considerably, but some suggest that the number of Tonkinese Christians stood at around 80,000 by the year 1639 and had increased more than fourfold to 350,000 by 1663.¹⁴

Ironically, the man who emerged as the most prominent figure in this early wave of Padroado Jesuit missionaries was not Portuguese but a Frenchman from Avignon, Father Alexandre de Rhodes. De Rhodes first traveled to Cochinchina in 1624 and undertook two years of language study in preparation for his missionary work. After completing his studies, in 1626 he traveled to Tonkin and quickly became active in this territory. De Rhodes had arrived at a critical juncture in modern Vietnamese history, for only three years after his arrival in Vietnam the seigniorial families who controlled the northern and southern Vietnamese territories commenced a civil war that would play out episodically over the next forty-five years. During this time both camps were highly sensitive to outsiders, whom they regarded as potential agents of the enemy—an attitude that complicated the status of resident Europeans. Under the circumstances, de Rhodes's position became increasingly precarious, and in 1630 he was expelled by the northern rulers and forced to retreat to Portuguese Macao, where events forced him to remain for the next decade. When he was finally able to return to Vietnam in 1640, de Rhodes traveled to the southern realm of the Nguyễn rulers. He remained there for seven more years until his presence sufficiently irritated the southern rulers that he was condemned to death in absentia and thus finally forced to leave the Vietnamese territories for good.

De Rhodes returned to Europe in 1649 convinced of the rich possibilities for conversion presented by the Vietnamese territories. He tried to persuade Pope Innocent X to send large numbers of Jesuits to Đại Việt to take advantage of this opportunity.¹⁵ The pope, however, proceeded cautiously, unwilling to endorse de Rhodes's project without further study. Frustrated, de Rhodes was forced to look elsewhere for support. In 1652 he traveled to Paris, where he found considerably more enthusiasm for his project and as well as several seminarian candidates deemed ready to make the journey to Asia. This effort caught the attention of the Portuguese, who vowed to block any French interference in their Padroado mission domain in Asia. "The Portuguese ambassador [to the papal state] made it known to the Pope that no French missionaries could be sent to Vietnam; that Portugal would be responsible for the nomination and maintenance of any Vietnamese clergy; and that should French missionaries be sent, there would be war against them."¹⁶

The Jesuit was not discouraged, however, and appealed next to the cardinals of the Congregation of the Propaganda Fide. The Propaganda Fide had been established in 1622 in an effort to impose direct papal authority over the global Catholic Church that was being created in historically non-Catholic regions. While it took de Rhodes some time to persuade its leadership, the Propaganda Fide eventually endorsed the project, which had the secondary benefits of eroding the power of the Portuguese and the Jesuits, each of which was viewed with antipathy by the Propaganda leadership.¹⁷ In the spring of 1658, the members of the Propaganda Fide agreed to take two interrelated steps. The first was to designate the mission territories across Indochina as apostolic vicariates, an act of geographical legerdemain designed to sidestep Padroado authority. The move effectively created a new form of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, one whose leaders were answerable to the papacy rather than to the Iberian monarchs or their delegates.¹⁸ Apostolic vicariates were created in various corners of the globe typically as temporary measures covering regions that did not yet have sufficient numbers of Christians to justify the creation of formal dioceses that would be part of the global Catholic hierarchy. The apostolic vicars were appointed to titular bishoprics of previously established but often defunct Christian communities, typically ones located in parts of the Middle East. Such appointments gave them the necessary ecclesiastical authority to oversee these communities but nevertheless brought them into direct conflict with the existing bishops appointed by Portuguese rulers under the Padroado system. In the Vietnamese case this was the bishop of Macao, whose diocese extended well into the Vietnamese realms.¹⁹

The second step taken by the Propaganda, in close cooperation with de Rhodes, was to create an entirely new missionary apparatus, the Foreign Missions Society of Paris (Missions Étrangères de Paris, MEP).²⁰ The MEP rapidly became a central institution in the story of Vietnamese Catholicism and more generally in the specifically French Catholic mission project across Asia. Unlike religious orders such as the Jesuits, whose members were united through vows that created a particular brotherhood, the MEP was founded as a congregation. Such an organization, whose members were referred to as seculars, was composed of a body of priests bound by a common commitment to a particular missionary objective. Once the apostolic vicariates and a new secular mission society had been created, the only remaining step was to link the two, and in 1660 two Frenchmen affiliated with the MEP were selected as apostolic vicars. François Pallu was named to head the mission responsible for Tonkin, Laos, and five provinces in southwestern China, while Pierre Lambert de la Motte was given authority over Cochinchina, four southeastern Chinese provinces, and the island of Hainan.

The appointment of the apostolic vicars, as Georg Schurhammer has pointed out, marked the beginnings of open conflict pitting those representing the Padroado-based community, which owed its origins and political allegiance to the

Portuguese and Spanish rulers, against the Propaganda-based community, whose loyalty was to the papacy and in particular the institution of the Propaganda Fide.²¹ Whether or not de Rhodes had anticipated it, the appointment of the French non-Jesuits Pallu and de la Motte to a mission area long dominated by Portuguese Jesuits represented the opening salvo in what would become a long-running contest for ecclesiastical authority in Đại Việt. It was a battle whose course was determined partly by doctrinal differences, partly by a pursuit of power for its own sake, and partly by complex national politics, which in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe were still closely bound to religious affairs. Eventually Philipphê Bình would find himself caught up in this contest in the late eighteenth century.

THE BEGINNINGS OF CONFLICT: MEP BISHOPS TRAVEL TO ANNAM

The seeds of the Catholic conflicts in Đại Việt having been planted in the 1650s during de Rhodes's discussions with the Propaganda Fide, their fruits first appeared when the two newly minted apostolic vicars set off for Asia.²² The two men traveled overland and separately, with de la Motte reaching Siam in the spring of 1662, followed by Pallu in 1664. Ironically, the two men spent almost no time in their assigned territories. Pallu himself never once set foot on Vietnamese soil: his sole attempt to reach Tonkin was foiled by a storm that forced his ship to divert to Spanish Manila, where he was captured and deported back to Europe. For his part, Father de la Motte made a brief trip to Tonkin in 1670, then another short trip to Cochinchina in 1677, but spent most of his time in Siam, where he died in 1679. Thus, while the two men had been sent to Southeast Asia as agents of the pope to gain a foothold in the Vietnamese mission field, their personal impact was limited to the largely symbolic status of forerunners, even as other MEP clerics were making their way to the Vietnamese realms. Among them was François Deydier, who arrived in Thăng Long (Hà Nội) in August of 1666, earning the distinction of becoming the first MEP missionary to set foot on Vietnamese soil.²³ By the time Deydier arrived in Tonkin as the forerunner of the new Paris mission organization, forty-eight Jesuit missionaries under the auspices of the Portuguese Padroado authority had already been active in Vietnamese territory over a period of four decades.²⁴ Deydier's arrival set the stage for a confrontation with the Jesuits as he moved rapidly to establish MEP authority across all Christian communities in the Vietnamese realms by drawing on the power of the newly established apostolic vicariate.

When de la Motte finally arrived in Tonkin four years later, he too acted with alacrity. In January of 1670 he ordained seven new priests and conferred minor orders on forty-eight Vietnamese converts, elevating them to positions as assistants to the Catholic community and the priests who served it. The following month

de la Motte convened the first synod to be held in Vietnam. The synod, a general gathering of clerics to discuss church matters, was designed in part to put an MEP stamp on the nature of the Christian mission in Vietnam, and also to address the still unresolved demarcation of clerical authority over the Vietnamese territories.²⁵ The synod's resolutions were formally accepted by Pope Clement X in 1673 with only minor modifications, and the pontiff issued a formal brief stipulating that Padroado authority was no longer in force in territories not under direct Portuguese control.²⁶ But the pope's declaration was not the final word on the relevance of the Padroado in Asia, whose power continued to be invoked in the battles over ecclesiastical jurisdiction in Asia. Indeed, more than four decades later in 1717, Pope Clement XI was forced to acknowledge that the Padroado authority still held sway over three of the Chinese bishoprics, including that of Macao.²⁷ Thus the tension that had existed between Padroado and papal authority since at least the beginning of the seventeenth century continued well into the eighteenth. It was a battle pitting the French "Sun King" against the Portuguese "Grocer King," as he was derisively labeled by his opponents, and Portuguese priests continued to travel to the Vietnamese and other Asian mission realms, where they contested the orders of the French clerics.²⁸

While the MEP synod had not definitively resolved the question of ecclesiastical authority, it forced the Jesuits to fight a rearguard action to reassert their own control over northern Vietnamese Catholics. The Jesuit Filipe Marini left Macao in February of 1671 bound for Tonkin, where he was to represent his order's interests in the face of this challenge. He was captured by Vietnamese authorities, however, as his boat traveled up the Red River, and found himself imprisoned at Hung Yên, halfway between the coast and the Vietnamese imperial capital at Thăng Long.²⁹ From his cell, he wrote a forty-nine-page letter to Father Deydier in which he challenged MEP claims of authority in Tonkin and reasserted the rights of the Jesuits and of the Portuguese in controlling this particular mission field.³⁰ His epistolary challenge to the authority of the apostolic vicars represented the first explicit Jesuit rejection of MEP claims as apostolic vicars.

FURTHER GEOGRAPHICAL DIVISIONS: TONKIN PARTITIONED

The dispatch of the two apostolic vicars to Vietnam in the 1660s accelerated the divisions of Catholicism in Vietnam, pitting the forces of the pope against those of the Portuguese crown and those of the secular MEP against the Jesuit order. Not long after the synod called by the MEP and the pope's endorsement of its conclusions, the Tonkinese mission field was subjected to a further, and this time geographical, division. In 1678 Tonkin was formally separated into two large dioceses, Eastern Tonkin and Western Tonkin, a move intended to simplify logistics for

organizing a mission that encompassed a large geographical territory. The dividing line was drawn roughly along the course of the Red River, though, as Alain Forest points out, not entirely along the primary branch of the river, but partially along one of its more southwestern secondary courses.³¹ As the apostolic vicar designate Jacques de Bourges wrote: “No division could be more fair and more convenient than that which nature herself has created, along the river which follows a straight line from the north through the kingdom of Bao (which is currently submitted to the authority of the Chua), to the royal city, and from which equally is a straight line toward the south, which enters the sea at a river mouth called Luc-va.”³² The Eastern Tonkin Vicariate consisted of the coastal region from the Chinese border to Nam Đĩnh, while the Western Tonkin Vicariate extended southward of the river, from the mountains to the west along the coast as far as modern-day Hà Tĩnh.³³ This dividing line would have considerable significance for Bình, for it ran through the heart of the Jesuit communities that were clustered to the north and south of Nam Đĩnh. Thus, in his later struggles in support of this community, Bình found himself frequently crossing this line as he served Padroado Christians who fell on both sides of it. This meant he would be doing battle with the leaders of both apostolic vicariates, complicating what was already an enormous challenge.

While the division of Tonkin into two vicariates was geographical, it brought with it significant national and religious institutional implications. The Western Tonkin Vicariate was left in the hands of the MEP, while the Eastern Tonkin Vicariate was to be placed under Dominican control upon the death of its incumbent, the trailblazing MEP priest François Deydier, which occurred in 1693.³⁴ The partition of Tonkin reduced French MEP authority in the northern Vietnamese territory to that region’s western half, which was contiguous with their existing MEP-controlled mission fields in Cochinchina further to the south. The Dominican eastern half, meanwhile, was readily accessible by boat from the order’s outpost in the Philippines, where large numbers of its missionaries were helping to evangelize the islands and to secure Spanish control. The appointment in 1696 of an Italian, Father Raimondo Lezzoli, as apostolic vicar of Eastern Tonkin, marked the beginning of a Dominican control of the region that would endure for more than two and a half centuries. Although Lezzoli was an Italian, the position would soon be taken on by an unbroken succession of Spaniards that would last until the middle of the twentieth century. The first Vietnamese was not appointed to the post until 1953, and the first non-Dominican bishop did not occupy the position until 1960.³⁵

The introduction of Dominican ecclesiastical authority in Tonkin must have been particularly galling to the Jesuits, for the Order of St. Dominic represented perhaps their most ardent theological and missiological foe. The Dominicans had been established by St. Dominic in the early thirteenth century as one of the first Catholic missionary orders. Since its founding, the order had established a reputation as a champion of Catholic orthodoxy and a critic of what its members

regarded as heresy. It had also been one of the first orders to send missionaries to Asia, doing so before the Jesuits. With the establishment of the Jesuits in 1540, and that order's venture into the Asian mission fields, it was perhaps inevitable that the two orders would come into conflict. Indeed, they were already engaging in theological disputes only a few decades after the founding of the Jesuits. True to their traditions, the Dominicans attacked what they regarded as overly accommodating attitudes of the Jesuits toward local practices. This dispute accelerated in the seventeenth century when the Dominicans took issue with the Jesuit tolerance of Chinese rituals such as ancestral veneration, which the older order regarded as inimical to Catholic beliefs. The Dominicans brought the matter to the Vatican, which was initially unwilling to take sides. Pressed by the Dominicans, however, Pope Clement XI ultimately ruled in favor of their position, which had the consequence of dramatically reducing the influence of Christianity in China, and with it that of the Jesuits themselves.³⁶

With the appointment of Spanish Dominicans to oversee the Eastern Tonkin Vicariate, the Spanish Philippines colony and its capital, Manila, became of increasing importance for Vietnamese Catholicism. The Philippines was the center of Spanish Dominican activity in Asia, and the region of Spanish responsibility in Vietnam was treated as an adjunct to the project based in Manila. As such, from the Dominican perspective the Vietnamese Christian territories were merely an extension of the "Provincia dominicana de Nuestra Señora del Rosario."³⁷ Manila remained an abstraction for the vast majority of Vietnamese Christians, but for a few it became concrete as a training site for aspiring catechists seeking to enter the priesthood. Such Vietnamese with connections to Dominican missionaries were sometimes given the opportunity to study in Manila at the College of San Juan de Letran, the University of St. Tomas, or sometimes both. The first Vietnamese to attend the College of San Juan de Letran was Jose Huyen de St. Tomas (1730–56), who came to Manila as a teenager in the later 1740s. He attended both institutions, slowly rising in the ranks from acolyte to sacerdote. Although he apparently intended to return to his community of Búi Chu, he died in Manila before being able to do so.³⁸ He was followed by five other Vietnamese students over the next half century, most of whom attended on a scholarship established by the Spanish king in 1738. The most notable among these was Vicente Liêm de la Paz (1732–73), who studied in Manila between 1752 and 1758 and then was ordained as a Dominican priest. He returned to Tonkin, where he served as a priest for the next fourteen years before being arrested in an anti-Christian crackdown in 1773. Not long after his arrest, he was executed by Trịnh authorities, becoming one of the most commemorated Vietnamese martyrs of the eighteenth century.

While the division of Tonkin between the Dominicans and the MEP reduced the potential for conflict between the two groups, it conspicuously ignored the still predominant Jesuit presence in the region. The Jesuit priests and their communities

were ostensibly answerable to the authority of the bishops who presided over the two parts of Tonkin, but in practice they retained a substantial measure of autonomy, and members of the order ministered to communities on both sides of the new partition line. Unsurprisingly, the Jesuits had been fiercely opposed to any such division of the territory in which they had invested so much time and effort. In their challenge to the division, some Jesuit priests had invoked the biblical tale of King Solomon, whose solution to a dispute between two women over a child had been to threaten to cut it in half, giving each woman a portion of the baby. The Jesuits regarded the Tonkinese mission field as their baby and saw its dismemberment as a death blow to their project rather than an equitable solution to a dispute.³⁹

RECALL OF THE JESUITS: 1678-1696

The dispatch of the new MEP apostolic vicars in the early 1670s and then the partition of Tonkin were the first blows to be felt by the Jesuits in Tonkin, but the most damaging fell a little more than ten years later in 1682, when the entire contingent of Jesuits was ordered to leave Tonkin and report to Rome. The impetus for this order was the Jesuits' continued resistance to their new ostensible overseers. The MEP apostolic bishops had been sent with papal briefs declaring their ecclesiastical authority over the Vietnamese territories and had insisted that the existing Jesuit missionaries accept their jurisdiction. Hardly surprisingly, the Jesuits refused to yield, continuing to exercise their religious functions without reference to the MEP bishops.⁴⁰ The Vatican sided with the apostolic vicars; in 1682 Pope Innocent XI recalled all of the Jesuits in both Vietnamese realms, Đàng Trong and Đàng Ngoài, and banned the order from sending any further missionaries to the region.⁴¹ The Jesuit missionaries were forced to abandon their mission fields and their communities to make the lengthy and arduous journey to Rome, their future entirely uncertain.⁴²

With the forced departure of their Jesuit priests in 1682, Vietnamese Catholic communities who had been under their religious leadership were confronted with a choice. Their members could either attempt to continue their religious practices and rituals on their own, maintaining the Jesuit-influenced approach to Catholicism, or they could shift their allegiance to one of the other orders or to the secular missionaries of the MEP. This choice was made in an atmosphere of great uncertainty about when or even whether the Jesuits might be permitted to return. Indeed, the recalled Jesuits themselves did not know what the future held. Thus the communities who held out hope that they might see their Jesuit priests again did so in the face of considerable challenges. As Binh later wrote, many of the local Catholics yielded to the appeals of the other religious communities, and the ranks of those in the Padroado community shrank dramatically. Binh compared the situation of the Vietnamese Christians in this period to that of the Jews awaiting

Moses after his ascent of Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments.⁴³ Binh argued that just as uncertainty about the return of Moses had driven the waiting Jews to turn to worship of the golden calf, so many Vietnamese Christians, unwilling to wait for an uncertain Jesuit return, had agreed to submit to the authority of the apostolic vicars and their affiliates. Later in his life, Binh would return to this same Old Testament analogy.

Meanwhile, in Europe, the Jesuit leadership forcefully argued for permission to return to Tonkin and eventually prevailed upon Pope Innocent XI to issue another papal brief dated January 7, 1689, authorizing their return. At the same time, however, the pope made it clear that he now expected the Tonkinese Christian communities to obey the orders of the apostolic vicars.⁴⁴ This message from the pontiff meant that any future rejection of the apostolic vicars' commands would constitute direct defiance of an explicitly stated papal order. Even with the permission to return, it would not be until 1696 that the first Jesuit missionaries finally returned to Tonkin and began to restore their communities.

THE PORTUGUESE AND GLOBAL DISSOLUTIONS OF THE JESUIT ORDER

Despite the pressures brought about by the partition of Tonkin, the brief recall of its missionaries, and the naming of apostolic vicars, the Jesuit-led Catholic community remained intact and its numbers stable. New Jesuit missionaries continued to arrive, still vying with the Dominicans and the MEP for Vietnamese adherents. The situation, however, changed dramatically in the middle of the eighteenth century, as Binh made clear in his self-introduction: "I was born in the year 1759, the same year that King Jose of the country Portugal destroyed the Order of the Virtuous Lord Jesus in his realm." Although Portugal had been the driving force establishing mission communities in Tonkin in the early seventeenth century, it was also the instigator of the Jesuit order's destruction. The agent of its demise was the Portuguese prime minister Sebastiao de Carvalho e Melo, the Marquis de Pombal.

Pombal's rise to prominence came in the aftermath of a massive earthquake in Lisbon in 1755, when he became the chief administrator of the Portuguese court's recovery and rebuilding efforts.⁴⁵ One of Pombal's major undertakings was to strengthen the royal court along absolutist lines, which required reducing the influence of nonroyalist forces both upon the court and upon politics in Portugal more generally. Among his primary concerns was the influence of the religious orders, particularly the Jesuits, whose power was both political and economic. Their political power lay in their schools and their role as confessors to the court, while their economic power came from the hundreds of thousands of acres of prime farmland that the order controlled in Brazil. Seeing what he regarded as the

pernicious influence of the Jesuits, Pombal set out to destroy the order in Portugal and beyond. He did this through the expedient of alleging Jesuit involvement in a plot to kill the Portuguese monarch, which allowed him to commence a systematic dismantling of the Jesuit order first in Portugal and then in its overseas possessions in Brazil and the Far East. By 1759, Pombal had succeeded in shutting down the Portuguese Jesuit order houses and banning the order from religious and secular affairs.⁴⁶ With this success under his belt, he turned to extirpating the Jesuit influence in Portugal's global outposts, including Goa and Macao. Pombal sent a ship to Macao, the Portuguese enclave off the southern Chinese coast, to collect both the Jesuit priests and their movable property and bring them to Rome. Among these men was an unnamed Vietnamese priest who refused to abandon the order and similarly rejected a return to Annam. Consequently, like the other Macao-based Jesuits, he found himself being shipped to exile in Rome. This sojourner never returned from his Italian exile and became the first Vietnamese to die in Europe. Binh later cited a European account of this man as having been "a person of humanity and virtue."⁴⁷

After learning of the order's destruction in Portugal, in 1760 the Jesuit father superior in Tonkin, François Antoine (?–1773), sent Father Onofre Villiani to Rome to request additional Jesuit missionaries. Villiani, known to the Vietnamese as Cố Hậu, was an important and senior leader of the Vietnamese Jesuit community, having arrived in Tonkin in 1750.⁴⁸ The Vatican agreed to the request, sending several priests to Tonkin and a few to Cochinchina as well. Upon arriving in Tonkin, the delegation's members learned that the Jesuit father superior, François Antoine, had just died. This led Father Villiani to take on the position as the Padroado community's senior clerical leader. He was supported in his work by several other veteran European Jesuit clerics, notably the Portuguese Father Tulano (Augustin) Carneiro (1722–1802), who had arrived in Tonkin in 1748, and the Neopolitan Father Nuncio Horta (or D'Orta; 1722–1801), who had arrived in 1760.⁴⁹ Of the three, Father Carneiro was of particular significance both for the length of his service to the Padroado Catholics and for his being Portuguese, and Binh, in his later writings, would refer to him as "our spiritual father."⁵⁰ Indeed, Tulano Carneiro would eventually outlive his counterparts to become the final European Jesuit priest to serve the Padroado Catholics.⁵¹

In the meantime, however, Pombal was not satisfied with dismantling the Jesuit order in Portugal and its overseas territories. He remained convinced that the continued existence of the Jesuit order as a global institution represented a grave threat to royal authority not only in Lisbon but also in other parts of Europe, where the order controlled many educational institutions and where its priests often served as royal confessors. Indeed, Pombal regarded religious orders more generally as corrosive of monarchy in Europe, at one point threatening to break the Portuguese Catholic Church from papal authority entirely. Seeing what he

regarded as the inherent dangers of the Jesuit order, Pombal mounted a vigorous anti-Jesuit campaign among leaders of the other European Catholic states, which gradually began to take their own steps against the order. The combination of Pombal's aggressive pressure and the possibility of a Portuguese break from Rome led a reluctant Pope Clement XIV to accede to Pombal's demand that the Jesuit order be outlawed in its entirety. The pope issued a brief to this effect in 1773. Thus, substantially as a result of Pombal's efforts, the Jesuit order found itself disestablished around the world, and communities formerly under the ecclesiastical guidance of its priests were now adrift.⁵² Among these communities was Philipphê Bình's. It was a community that had been shaped by Jesuit practices and approaches to Christianity for more than a century and a half, and the order's demise came as a profound shock.

The dissolution of the Jesuits represented a golden opportunity for their rivals in Tonkin. The French MEP and Spanish Dominican apostolic vicars acted quickly, urging the members of the local Jesuit-led Catholic communities at long last to accept the vicars as the leaders of the local Catholic hierarchy. This proved not to be a simple matter. Although news of the Jesuit dissolution apparently reached Tonkin by 1774, the Jesuit loyalist priests did nothing to spread this information, which they tried to keep a secret as long as they could.⁵³ When the news finally did trickle down to the Jesuit-led communities, many refused to accept this change in church regimes, preferring to retain their autonomy and relying on their own resources to support themselves. Bình's community was among those that refused the overtures from the MEP and the Dominicans, seeking instead to find ways to preserve their distinctive community identity and their particular forms of ritual and practice.

The decision to reject the authority of the apostolic vicars was not an act of stubborn caprice but hinged on factors both historical and cultural. In the first place, these communities had witnessed the disappearance of their Jesuit priests before (in the 1680s), only to see them return once the politics of the situation had been sorted out. It is likely that many believed, or hoped, that the latest attack on the Jesuits would also prove but a temporary setback. Indeed, at some level the situation was not quite as dire as it had been during the earlier Jesuit recall. This time the Jesuit priests had not been withdrawn, so their ties to their congregants remained largely intact. Moreover, though their order no longer existed, the men had been instructed to continue to function as ordained priests for their respective communities. This meant that the Padroado community initially experienced little disruption to its distinctive ritual and cultural traditions, and the continuing presence of sympathetic priests made the community's defiance of MEP and Dominican pressure easier to sustain. Although the presence of a large contingent of priests in the Jesuit lineage was comforting, it was not in itself a guarantee of the community's survival. Not content to rely solely on the hope that the Jesuit order

might somehow be restored, the Padroado community's members also began to take active measures to reverse this setback.

FOLLOWING "FATHER LUIS": LIFE AS AN ITINERANT CATHOLIC CATECHIST

A major part of the community's strategy to ensure its survival consisted of supporting training for its native sons, who might eventually be ordained to continue to serve the Padroado faithful. Philipphê Binh was one of these, and he began his religious training in 1775 at the age of sixteen. As he noted in his introduction, "In that year, I went with Master Luis, and left my home." This was a crucial moment in his life, as it marked a new direction that would guide him for the rest of his days. It was the beginning of a long period of apprenticeship, study, and service. It was also the start of a frequently itinerant existence that would take Binh up and down the heavily Catholic coastal reaches of Tonkin between Thanh Hóa and Hải Phòng.

Philipphê Binh's new mentor, the man he referred to as "Father Luis," was an Italian Jesuit by the name of Alexandre-Pompée Castiglioni who had recently arrived in Tonkin as part of the contingent Villiani had brought back from Europe. Castiglioni was a member of an Italian noble family from Milan and a close relative of Cardinal Valenti Gonzaga (1690–1756). When he was still a young man, his father had identified a suitable spouse for his son and made arrangements for their marriage. Castiglioni, however, had other plans, informing his father that he had no intention of marrying her, for he was preparing to enter the priesthood. Shortly thereafter, at the age of twenty-two, he joined the Jesuit order and began training for a career as a missionary.⁵⁴ Thus, when the Vatican authorized an additional group of Jesuits to be sent to Tonkin in the company of Father Villiani, Castiglioni was ready. The young Italian prepared to head into the mission field with enthusiasm and resolve but also more than a bit of trepidation, as reflected in a farewell letter to a favorite aunt written in December 1772:

Finally, you no doubt would like to know, my dear aunt, what sort of a place this Tonkin is. It is a country covered with swamps, where one finds neither bread, nor wine, nor oil, nor butter, nor milk, nor meat, nor game, nor eggs, nor poultry, nor birds, nor vegetables, nor pastures, nor fruit: in a word, one finds there absolutely nothing but rice, sun, and hot water: hot, because cold is considered harmful. They also have bandits, whose objective is to capture men in order to sell them. There is a price on the head of Europeans and, when they are captured, they are certain to be hanged. The Christians number to three hundred thousand, constituting 11 percent of the inhabitants: the rest are idolaters. The country is extremely poor and the climate very hot. The difficult thing is getting there. There are various winds, various patrol boats, and various reefs that one encounters along the coast that do not allow anyone to pass unmolested. But what is all this to me? Onwards!⁵⁵

Shortly after dispatching this letter with its bleak view of his destination, Father Castiglioni, now thirty-six years old, departed for the Tonkin mission as a member of Father Villiani's delegation, prepared to serve the Padroado community.⁵⁶

Less than two years after his arrival in Tonkin, Castiglioni was approached by a young Vietnamese, Philipphê Bình and was asked whether the priest would be willing to provide religious training. The Italian Jesuit agreed, and Bình became his companion in the years that followed. Bình's notebooks say little about the nature of his training during the twelve years he spent, intermittently, with Father Castiglioni, though from his scattered comments it likely consisted of what Peter Phan has described as "on-the-job training."⁵⁷ Father Castiglioni and his young protégé spent much of this time traveling around the region, during the course of which the Italian Jesuit instructed Bình in Catholic teachings, while in return his new catechist would have served as a cultural, geographical, and linguistic mediator. By serving as Father Castiglioni's catechist, Bình would have been educated in Catholic ritual, history, and practice, while also becoming steeped in the history and traditions of the Tonkinese Jesuit community. Their relationship was typical of that between European missionaries and the young men who had been identified as promising candidates for serving the church and its communities. Rather than immediately immersing themselves in academic study in a religious school, these men often began their training as apprentices to the European clergy, serving as their assistants in conducting rituals and caring for local church communities. These apprentices were labeled as "catechists" and would engage in years of learning by doing and observing the actions of their mentor priest.⁵⁸ Most would never be formally ordained, instead remaining in the ranks of a kind of liturgical support staff. A few, like Bình, would eventually demonstrate the skills and intelligence to be ordained as Catholic priests. But the necessary training would often take years or decades. At the same time, while Bình learned from his mentor, the priest learned much from a young man who amounted to a kind of "native informant." Bình knew the area in which he had grown up, its people, and, perhaps most importantly, their language. He would have helped the priest navigate the cultural and geographical terrain of coastal Tonkin as the European slowly learned the language and came to understand that perhaps Tonkin was not quite the desert he had described in the letter to his aunt.

Although Bình did most of his training with Father Castiglioni, circumstances sometimes forced him to leave his mentor and spend time with others. Indeed, not long after beginning his apprenticeship, Bình had to leave Castiglioni temporarily, while the Italian was traveling so extensively he could not support Bình's training. Bình moved in with a Father Tước in Xứ Đông until Castiglioni returned from his travels and Bình was able to rejoin him for parts of 1776 and 1777. Soon, however, Bình was forced again to leave his teacher temporarily, for 1777 was a year of enormous social upheaval that was spawned by a widespread famine followed by

a large-scale rebel uprising, both of which caused enormous hardship and population displacement.⁵⁹ Castiglioni sent Binh to stay in the residence of an MEP cleric, Father Chính Trung, where the young catechist spent time copying out books before eventually rejoining Father Castiglioni.

Not long after reconnecting with his student, Father Castiglioni brought Binh with him to a meeting at the small village of Hà Lạn at the end of March of 1779. Others at the gathering included the remaining Jesuit loyalist missionaries in Tonkin and the recently appointed apostolic vicar of Eastern Tonkin, Bishop Manuel Obelar. The bishop likely had called the meeting to discuss his vision for how to address the lingering tensions between the Dominican and Jesuit loyalist communities. The discussion centered on the precise nature of their support for the Padroado community and what role these priests would continue to play. Binh was there as an observer and companion to Father Castiglioni, and in his later histories of Tonkin he recorded the meeting's key issues as best he could remember them. The discussions among the clergymen left a considerable number of questions unresolved, and it was decided that further clarification would be required from Rome, which would necessitate sending a delegation to the Vatican. In June, Father Villiani sent a letter to Father Castiglioni inviting him to a meeting to discuss the trip. At the gathering the senior cleric told Castiglioni that they had decided to send a delegation to the Vatican that would include Villiani himself and two of the community's more advanced catechists, John Thiều and Paul Cuyễn.⁶⁰

As the delegation's departure was delayed, Castiglioni became increasingly apprehensive about the state of the Padroado community, and toward the end of 1779 he began to make plans of his own to return to Europe, where he also hoped to recruit additional priests. As he was preparing to travel to Macao, however, he fell ill, first with malaria and then with an intestinal virus caused by drinking unboiled water, and so was unable to leave.⁶¹ Castiglioni continued to worry about the state of the mission and about training additional Vietnamese catechists. In particular, he wanted to find a way to train them without having to send them to the seminaries run by the MEP or the Dominicans. He wrote to Rome requesting permission to establish such a school, and while he received a reply it did not address the question of the schools. At some point in 1781 he determined to follow up his request in person and once again made plans to travel to Europe, going so far as to assign Binh to take care of his religious property in his absence. This trip, too, stalled, and Castiglioni remained in Tonkin, where he continued to mentor his protégé. By this time Binh was apparently becoming quite skilled in using the romanized alphabet, likely writing in Latin, for he regularly drafted letters for Castiglioni in his correspondence with the apostolic vicars.⁶²

Meanwhile, even as Castiglioni made repeated unsuccessful efforts to leave Tonkin, in July of 1780 Father Villiani and his Vietnamese companions, Thiều and Cuyễn, finally set off on their long journey to Europe.⁶³ After making its way to

Canton, the delegation had to wait some time before finding a Portuguese vessel destined for Lisbon. The journey suffered a second lengthy delay when their boat stopped in Mozambique off the eastern coast of Africa for several months before eventually resuming the voyage to Portugal. When the small delegation finally arrived in Lisbon sometime in early 1781, its members spent a month recovering from their long journey while Father Villiani met with friends in the local clergy to talk about their situation. These consultations completed, the small group set out for Rome, where they hoped to use Father Villiani's connections to recruit more priests for the community. Unfortunately, upon reaching Rome they learned that Villiani's primary contact in the Holy See had died, and although Villiani presented his appeal directly to Pope Pius VI he received no commitments. When it became clear that there was little he could do, Father Villiani opted not to return to Tonkin choosing instead to stay behind in the hopes that he could persuade other clergy to join the Tonkin mission. Although unsuccessful in gaining any commitments from the pope, Villiani did manage to secure places at a local seminary for his two Vietnamese companions to continue their education.⁶⁴

Over the next four years, Thiều and Cuyễn studied Italian and then completed their training for the priesthood, after which both men were ordained.⁶⁵ At this point, they presented a formal petition to the pope requesting that he appoint a bishop to their northern Vietnamese community.⁶⁶ The pope responded by stating that such an appointment lay outside of his authority and that responsibility for making it rested with the king of Portugal, who still held the Padroado grant.⁶⁷ The pope's disingenuous reply allowed him to deflect responsibility for the matter while effectively trapping Thiều and Cuyễn. When the two Vietnamese clerics requested permission to travel to Lisbon to put their request directly to the Portuguese ruler, their petition was denied. Meanwhile, the apostolic vicar for Western Tonkin, Father Jean Davoust, tried to force their return. He wrote a letter to the Holy See claiming authority over the men but also promising to assist them in completing their clerical training upon their return.⁶⁸ His requests to have the men sent home were, however, turned down by Vatican authorities.

When their departure could no longer be put off, the men were finally given permission to leave Rome. But they were still not allowed to travel to Lisbon. Instead, Thiều and Cuyễn were diverted to Paris, where they were housed at the MEP headquarters on Rue du Bac, one of the strongholds of anti-Padroado sentiment in Europe and Tonkin. After roughly two years, the men were permitted to leave Paris but were once again denied permission to travel to Lisbon and were forced instead to return home to Tonkin. When Thiều and Cuyễn at last reached Tonkin again in late 1787, they had gained valuable experience of the European world and, even more importantly, had returned as ordained priests. They had not, however, moved the community any closer to its objective of securing a formal bishop for Tonkin. Also, unfortunately for the Padroado community, although these men

had left as strong supporters of the Jesuit loyalists, they returned with an affinity for the French MEP, likely a result of their time spent in Paris at the congregation's seminary, and opted to side with these rivals of the Padroado community.⁶⁹

SEMINARY TRAINING AT BÙI CHU

Although Fathers Thiều and Cuyên had not secured the bishop they had sought, they did not return entirely empty-handed. They carried a letter from the pope directing the apostolic vicars of both Eastern and Western Tonkin to enroll students from the former Jesuit communities in their seminaries and to train them to serve the Padroado community. This looked like a hopeful compromise that would secure at least some measure of autonomy for the Jesuit loyalist Catholics in sustaining their sense of community. A small number of seminarians were thus taken in for tutelage to prepare them for the priesthood. Among those was Binh. His on-the-job training with Father Castiglioni had been an indispensable aspect of his religious education, but to advance to the priesthood he would eventually have had to receive more formal education in the context of a school or seminary. As it happened it was an ideal, if bittersweet, moment to make this transition, as Binh had just lost his longtime mentor after a protracted illness. Binh writes that Castiglioni had fallen ill in October of 1786, suffering from an unrelenting headache that local Catholic doctors were unable to resolve. A non-Christian doctor was then called in, presumably to apply Vietnamese medicine, but this also failed to cure Castiglioni's condition. After struggling with this illness for six months, Castiglioni died on April 19, 1787.⁷⁰ Binh entered the seminary at Búi Chu shortly thereafter.

In entering a seminary, Binh was joining an institution with deep roots in the European missionary project in Tonkin. From the outset, European missionaries sought to do more than merely baptize Vietnamese into the faith. While they were the primary force for conversion among the Vietnamese populations, both Jesuits and secular missionaries of the MEP understood that ordination of local priests or at least the training of ritual assistants would be essential if the new Catholic communities were to survive. Thus European missionaries to Tonkin had begun to establish religious communities for committed laypersons, as well as schools to provide religious training. These schools would become the mechanism by which to produce both small numbers of ordained native priests, as well as much larger numbers of lay catechists trained to carry out a variety of support activities, from maintaining church buildings to procuring ritual objects, and even performing certain sacraments for members of the community.⁷¹ The first Vietnamese catechists were trained at an MEP seminary established at the Siamese capital of Ayutthaya in 1665.⁷² Siam was a relative safe haven for European missionaries, who were not regarded as a threat to the Siamese monarchy, and it became an outpost

for missionary activity in other parts of mainland Southeast Asia during its first decades. Missionaries in the Vietnamese realm, however, were determined to create such colleges closer to home, and by 1682 a number of “petits collèges” had been established in Tonkin, including in Nghệ An, Sơn Nam, and Kinh Bắc. While the colleges at Sơn Nam and Kinh Bắc were temporarily downgraded to “schools” after the death of their founder, by 1724 they had once again been upgraded, and all three served as centers of religious training for catechists as well as for indigenous priests. Persecution by the Vietnamese court occasionally threatened these schools and their pupils, and the notable college at Kê Vĩnh (in Sơn Nam province) was razed in a crackdown in 1773 and not restored until seven years later.⁷³

Bình appears to have entered a smaller seminary located in the Eastern Tonkin Vicariate at Bùi Chu. Bình’s course of study at the Bùi Chu seminary likely consisted of a combination of language and religious subjects. Most of his fellow students would have studied as catechists, to play a supporting role in the church communities, while a smaller number, like Bình, would have pursued more rigorous training to enable their eventual ordination as priests. Their religious training would have involved both reading texts and memorizing portions of them, since students might well not be able to carry texts with them, or even have access to them, after the completion of their studies. European missionaries were often astounded at the capacity of their Vietnamese students to memorize large sections of these texts, prayers, and catechisms, a reflection no doubt of a society in which the transmission of “literature” had of necessity been oral.⁷⁴ The texts included those composed in Chinese by Jesuits active in the China mission field. The students would almost certainly also have studied locally produced catechisms either in the romanized alphabet or in *chữ nôm*. It is possible that draft or hand-copied versions of Alexandre de Rhodes’s *Cathechismus* might have been in use, though it is unlikely that the version printed in Rome in 1651 was in circulation in Tonkin at the time.⁷⁵ Indeed, students who were engaged in the more rigorous course of study to be ordained as priests would also have studied Latin, giving them access to European religious books in that language. Among the texts they would have read were *The Lives of the Saints*, Thomas Aquinas’s *The Imitation of Christ*, and St. Frances de Sales’s *Introduction to Devout Life*.⁷⁶

As the catechist of a devoted Jesuit loyalist, Father Castiglioni, Bình was preparing himself to serve the Padroado community, which would have placed him in a significant tradition of locally trained and ordained Vietnamese clergy in the Jesuit lineage. Over the course of the first 130 years of their presence in the Vietnamese territories (1626–1752), the Jesuits had admitted thirty-one Vietnamese men into their order. Of these, eleven were ordained as priests, while the other twenty were admitted as lay brothers. Twenty-five of these men had entered the order in Tonkin, while the remaining six had done so in Cochinchina.⁷⁷ During his own time at the seminary, Bình became well acquainted with several of the other seminarians

who were also advancing toward full ordination. He became particularly close to Manuel Xavier Trêu, a student from Nghệ An. Bình would later describe their relationship as being like that between King David and Jonathan, men who shared a common soul and kindred spirit. While Bình would go on to serve the Padroado community in Tonkin and then as an envoy to Europe, Father Trêu would serve in the southern reaches of Tonkin, where he would be closer to his home in Nghệ An. There he was captured by the Tây Sơn regime during a crackdown on Christianity, probably in the course of 1798. Later, in the course of his research in Lisbon, Bình would learn that his friend had been martyred for the faith in the Tây Sơn capital at Phú Xuân in 1800 and would recall that he had last seen his friend and classmate in April of 1794, when Bình had left their common house.⁷⁸

In addition to Trêu, several other supporters of the Jesuit community were entering local seminaries during the years of Bình's own training. The year after Bình began his studies, a young man by the name of Xuân entered the seminary at Kẻ Là. He had previously been a catechist working with Father Cuyễn, one of the two men who had returned from Rome the previous year. Upon entering the seminary, Xuân decided to change his name to better reflect his commitment to the Padroado community and its clergy. He adopted the name Trung, meaning "loyalty," to show his support for the community. Not long thereafter, a young man from the southern region of Nghệ An by the name of Quỳnh followed his mentor priest to the coastal Tonkin region and entered the seminary at Kẻ Vĩnh. He too opted to change his name, choosing Nhân, or "humaneness," to indicate his commitment to the order as well. It is striking that both names, used to indicate adherence to a particular Catholic religious community, are ones with deep resonance for Confucianism, as loyalty and humaneness are among the core virtues espoused by Confucianist scholars.⁷⁹

BÌNH'S ORDINATION: A MOMENT OF JOY AND DISAPPOINTMENT

The project to train the new catechists specifically for the Padroado community was dealt a distinct setback in 1789 with the deaths in rapid succession of the apostolic vicars of Eastern and Western Tonkin. The project had been very much tied to these two leaders, and there was little assurance that any successors would continue it. At the same time, however, the apostolic vicars' deaths did represent something of a reprieve for a community under increasing pressure, for they left the leadership of the vicariates in flux. In Western Tonkin Father Jacques-Benjamin Longer (1752–1831) took up the post as apostolic vicar, but as he had not yet been consecrated as a bishop he could not ordain a successor for the apostolic vicariate in Eastern Tonkin, nor did he have the standing to ordain new priests. Consequently, his authority was less than complete. Furthermore, the

political situation in Tonkin remained highly uncertain in the aftermath of a series of invasions and counterattacks between the Tây Sơn armies and their Trịnh/Lê rivals, and then a large-scale Qing invasion in the summer of 1788. While the Tây Sơn had succeeded in driving out the Qing army in early 1789, it would take some time to secure Chinese recognition of the new regime. In addition, loyalists of the former regime resisted the authority of the new government, and some went into rebellion against Tây Sơn rule. Not until the summer of 1792 did the situation calm down enough to allow the members of the Catholic community to move about with some ease. Father Longer was then finally able to travel to Macao, where in September of 1792 he was formally consecrated as a bishop by the bishop of Macao, Marcelino José da Silva. During this three-year interval, the priests serving the Padroado community, and those training for the ministry, could carry out their duties within this Catholic population without having to answer to religious leaders hostile to their project. Although the numbers of their priests was diminishing, the community was still able to function according to its own practices.

However, Father Longer's consecration as bishop significantly altered the ecclesiastical landscape, for upon his return to Tonkin in early 1793 he was invested with the authority to consecrate his counterpart in Eastern Tonkin to the episcopate as well. Father Feliciano Alonso had been serving as the "vicar general" of Eastern Tonkin since the death of Bishop Manuel Obelar in 1789. Prior to his promotion, Father Alonso had served as a missionary priest in coastal Tonkin, where he had arrived from his native Spain in 1766. During his years as a local priest he had gained a reputation as a compassionate and understanding man, attributes that earned him the nickname "El Simpático" (the congenial one).⁸⁰ Like his predecessor, Father Alonso was based in Trung Linh, a few miles southeast of Nam Định and less than ten miles from the coast. On March 10, 1793, Father Longer formally consecrated his counterpart as bishop, with the nominal title of bishop of Fez (Fessee).⁸¹ Consequently, the two vicariates were once again under the formal authority of bishops. The newly ordained bishops in Eastern and Western Tonkin, now secure in their authority as both apostolic vicars and bishops, were determined to assert their vision of the ecclesiastical chain of command and were no longer willing to tolerate the autonomy of the Padroado priests and their community.

This development prompted the Padroado community leadership, including both its European priests and its Vietnamese clergy and catechists, to hold a meeting to decide on a course of action. The attendees decided at this time that they would send a three-man delegation to Macao to request a bishop of their own, one dedicated to the needs of their particular community.⁸² This had important implications for the community's future, as its members had been pinning their hopes on the small cohort of men who had begun their religious training at the Kê Bù seminary in 1787 after the return of Fathers Thiệu and Cuyễn from Rome. By the

time that the two bishops had been ordained and had begun to sketch out plans for their respective vicariates, the seminarians were finishing their training and would soon be ready for ordination as priests. The bishops decided to hold a collective ordination ceremony for the men and selected an auspicious date for the event, the Feast Day of St. Andrew, November 30. So on that day in late November 1793 the six seminarians were formally ordained in a ceremony conducted by the two apostolic vicars at the seminary in Kê Bùì. The six represented a variety of regions, for Binh reported that two were from more southerly areas, one from Phú Xuân and a second from Nghệ An, three others were from Xứ Nam (around Nam Định, near the seminary itself), and one, Binh himself, was from slightly further north in Xứ Đông (the area of Hải Dương).⁸³ Philiphê Bình had finally become a priest, sixteen years after beginning his religious training with Father Castiglioni and six years after entering the seminary.⁸⁴ This represented a crucial moment for the Padroado community, for Binh was one of their own. He understood their commitments and their history; he was sympathetic to their determination to remain loyal to their traditions; and he was a dynamic and activist priest, willing to speak his mind and to defend the community even against long odds.

It was, however, a bittersweet moment, for what might have been a celebration to welcome half a dozen new priests into the ranks of those serving the community saw not a single one assigned to serve the Padroado Catholics. Instead, the apostolic vicars designated them to serve either the French MEP or the Spanish Dominican communities.⁸⁵ Binh was intensely frustrated by this turn of events, for as he understood it he and the other five men had been trained specifically to help the underserved Padroado Christians. He saw this redirection of the new priests' appointments both as a violation of the Vatican's intentions in setting up this arrangement and as a repudiation of the promises made by the two earlier apostolic vicars. As he wrote in his later notebooks: "Our Christians [Padroado] were thus abandoned to hunger and thirst; they forced our Christians to bow to their priests, just as when the pharaoh forced the offspring of Jacob to become his subjects in the country of Egypt and to forget about the undertakings of Joseph."⁸⁶ It was clear that the only way to improve the situation for the Padroado community would be to secure a bishop of their own.