

Christian-Muslim Relations A Bibliographical History

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(1700-1800)

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The Yongzheng Emperor

Yinzhen; Shizong

DATE OF BIRTH 13 December 1678
PLACE OF BIRTH Beijing, China
DATE OF DEATH 8 October 1735
PLACE OF DEATH Beijing, China

BIOGRAPHY

Following the proclamation of the Sacred Edict (Chinese, *Shengyu*) in 1670 by the Kangxi Emperor (r. 1662-1722), his son and successor, the Yongzheng Emperor (r. 1723-35; personal name Yinzhen; posthumous name Shizong) promulgated the *Amplified instructions on the Sacred Edict* (Chinese: *Shengyu guangxun*) in 1724. This edict influenced the place of Christianity in China, and most likely also Christian-Muslim relations in the country. Neither a Christian nor a Muslim, the Manchu Yongzheng Emperor ruled China for 13 years, during which time he was able to consolidate Qing power.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Secondary

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WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Shengyu guangxun

‘Amplified instructions on the Sacred Edict’

‘The Yongzheng edicts’

DATE 1724

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Chinese

DESCRIPTION

In 1670, the Kangxi Emperor instigated a series of instructions for use in local rituals known as the Sacred Edict (Chinese: *Shengyu*), which were

expanded upon by his heir, the Yongzheng Emperor, in 1724. Under the Yongzheng Emperor, the Sacred Edict became a set of 16 maxims that were disseminated throughout China by way of a widespread educational system of village lectures.

Of interest here is the seventh maxim, which states, *Chu yiduan yi chong zhengxue* ('Do away with errant teachings, in order to exalt the correct doctrine') (de Bary and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese tradition*, p. 71). This can alternatively be rendered as, 'Degrade strange religions, in order to exalt the orthodox doctrine' (Qing and Milne, *Sacred Edict*, p. 70, 1870, 2nd edition) or, 'Extirpate heresy to exalt orthodoxy' (Menegon, 'Yongzheng's conundrum', p. 318).

In the Yongzheng Emperor's expansion on the maxims, *Shengyu guangxun* ('Amplified instructions on the Sacred Edict'), he explicitly links this maxim to Christianity (here called *Xiyangjiao* or 'Western ocean teachings'). He notes that Christianity and the men who seek to spread it are corrupt, but that they are in government employ because of their skills in mathematics (Qing and Milne, *Sacred Edict*, p. 72). Despite their position, they should not be believed and their religion should not be mistaken as good (Qing and Milne, *Sacred Edict*, p. 88). This maxim acted to proscribe Catholicism in Chinese provinces apart from Beijing, although illegal missionary activity continued (Reilly, *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom*, p. 43; Menegon, 'Yongzheng's conundrum', pp. 311-12). In the year before the proclamation (1723), the neo-Confucian scholar Zhang Boxing (1652-1725), who was anti-Christian, had been promoted to the presidency of the Board of Rites, meaning that 'anti-Christian policy recommendations reached the new emperor' (Menegon, 'Yongzheng's conundrum', p. 316). Meanwhile, other anti-Christians also took high-ranking positions, and lower-ranking members of the Board of Rites also presented anti-Christian memoranda to the emperor (Menegon, 'Yongzheng's conundrum', p. 316), though the driving force behind the anti-Christian legislation was the emperor himself (Menegon, 'Yongzheng's conundrum', p. 317).

Despite this, even after the promulgation of his maxims, the Yongzheng Emperor received the Jesuits at his court several times. On 21 July 1727, he lectured the missionaries on the inherent sameness of all teachings, including Islam and Christianity, linking this to the futility of the Christian mission (Menegon, 'Yongzheng's conundrum', p. 330). However, the audience on 8 November 1724, when he received the lay surgeon Dionisio Gagliardi and the priest Nicolò Tomacelli, is

of particular interest. At this meeting, he explicitly juxtaposed his anti-Christian policy with his positive policy towards Islam, noting:

Among the sects to be prohibited they proposed to me the religion of the Muhammedans, so that I would proscribe it. But I replied that the accusers do not consider in fact that the Muhammedans never provoke any disturbance, they propagandise their sect only among their own descendants, and do not oblige anybody to follow it, they accommodate themselves to the customs of the empire, do not offer any cause for accusations, and do not impede the cult and the doctrine of Confucius. (Menegon, 'Yongzheng's conundrum', p. 324)

SIGNIFICANCE

Although Yongzheng's anti-heresy rulings were eventually applied to Muslim insurgents under the Qianlong Emperor (r. 1735-99) and subsequent rulers (Laamann, 'Anti-Christian agitation', p. 50), Zvi Ben-Dor Benite notes that in the early 20th century, at least, the anti-Christian nature of the Yongzheng Edicts was used by Muslim scholars as proof of historical Muslim innocence (Benite, "Western gods meet in the East", p. 523), because, unlike the Jesuits, Muslims were not guilty of the charge of proselytisation. In this sense, the Yongzheng Edicts have had a clear influence on present-day Christian-Muslim relations, at least in the academic sphere.

The effect the Edicts had on Christian-Muslim relations at the time they were promulgated is unclear, though the fact that the Yongzheng Emperor proscribed Christianity, specifically juxtaposing the reasons for this with the reasons for not proscribing Islam, is significant. It is possible that such a policy fostered further anti-Muslim sentiment among Christians and missionaries, and gave Muslims a sense (and very real position) of superiority over Christians. It may also be assumed that, given the village lecture system, which sought to spread the contents of the Edicts nationwide, individual Muslims and their communities were encouraged in anti-Christian sentiment.

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