ASIAN SAINTS: THE 486 CATHOLIC CANONIZED SAINTS AND BLESSED OF ASIA
By Francis X. Clark, S.J.
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Reviewed by John N. Schumacher

Father Clark has been writing and teaching missiology since a time when the word was scarcely known in the Philippines. This present work has a genesis going back to 1979 when he wrote a brief pamphlet with the same title. He further developed the subject as a chapter of his well-known An Introduction to the Catholic Church of Asia in 1987. Now after several years of research, including trips to the shrines in memory of the indigenous saints in other Asian countries, especially the martyrs among them, Clark has investigated their background, and made inquiries on the ongoing existence of ordinary peoples’ devotion to their own saints and blessed. The book appeared just as Pope John Paul II announced the canonization later that year [2000] of the 87 indigenous Chinese martyrs, together with the missionaries who died along with them.
Obviously, a book on Asian saints could scarcely give an account of each one without becoming an encyclopedia. Moreover, for some of the victims of mass persecutions, little is known of their lives beyond the fact that they did exist, and did clearly die in defense of their faith. Clark's appropriate solution has been to select under each country certain persons whose stories are striking for their fidelity and courage in the face of often horrifying tortures and death. The selections seem to me to be appropriate and apt for the purpose of the book, which is to inspire rather than merely catalog. Nonetheless, he includes several appendices listing the martyrs of Vietnam, China, Korea, and Japan, with such data as are available on the birth, state of life, manner and date of martyrdom. In both respects he eminently succeeds. Even being, as I am, a historian with more than a superficial knowledge of the local Churches of Asia, I have been both abundantly informed and truly inspired.

As a Church historian, I have often been repelled by a concept of the Church as comprised of the activities of popes and bishops and ecclesiastical institutions, in spite of the fact we may say so glibly, "the Church is the People of God." Here we have a certified sample of God's people, reminding us of the immense further number of unknown saints of every state of life, martyrs or not, for whom the canonized stand as a signpost and reminder. This is the real Church, and it is to be hoped that readers will not merely be concerned with those of their own countries, but with all their Asian sisters and brothers. Father Clark has made a fine contribution to this goal.

Finally, it may be noted that one chapter is devoted to those saints and blessed who were not martyred, due to varying historical circumstances. And, a final appendix takes a glimpse at some prospective candidates for canonization, whose causes are still in active process. The book as a whole is to be recommended for any educated Christian reading English, and it may be hoped that it could be translated into other languages as well, particularly as the Asian Churches now have begun to realize their common bonds.