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3. The Communist Period (1934 and 1941-1972)

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3. The Communist Period (1934 and 1941-1972)

Introduction

Shortly after the establishment of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949, the Communist Party's hostility toward religion, and the Catholic Church in particular, became evident. Although the Party's knowledge of the Church was sketchy, it lumped the Church together with the Western imperial powers, even though the great majority of Catholics were Chinese and not foreigners. Among the reasons for Communist hostility towards the Church were the Party's atheistic ideology, the Church's foreign appearance, her relations with the Nationalists, and her apparent wealth in land ("landlords"). Believers suffered a great deal from the Party's policy that all levels of society and every organization be answerable to the Party. The new government eventually demanded that the Church end all international links, including the link to the Holy See. Catholics were split on how to respond to this ultimatum, even to this day. Those who accepted the government policy experienced temporary relief from persecution, but all suffered terribly during the years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

During the period between 1949 and 1952, many foreign missionaries were accused of being spies and counter-revolutionaries and were denounced in public and put on trial. Regardless of evidence or the lack of it, the outcome of the trials was a foregone conclusion. They were first imprisoned and then expelled. After foreign missionaries were eliminated, Chinese bishops and clerics were then 'promoted' to the status of primary enemies. After the bishops and priests were imprisoned, Catholic lay leaders became the primary enemies. In this way the voice of the Church was systematically silenced.

Many suffered, as they say, in the line of duty, while many suffered explicitly for the faith and are considered martyrs. The fidelity of these men and women is a testimony to the depth of their faith and their heroic commitment to the Lord and his Church. A number of the stories are known, many are not. Some were tried in public, some were put under prolonged house arrest, some were killed in the middle of the night, some were sent to prison, some to labor camps, some to re-education among the peasants, some lived impoverished lives suffering in silence for their faith. Here are only a few of the stories which can be documented. (Hugh O'Donnell, CM)

Martyrs of the Congregation of the Mission

1. Fr. Giacomo ANSELMO, CM, Member of the Turin Province, born in Arenzano near Genoa (Italy) on 28 November 1883 and died in Lin-kiang in March 1934.

Fr. Anselmo went to China in 1922. He was put in charge of the Christian community at Lin-kiang where he established several works, among which was a female orphanage to which he devoted great zeal.

On 24 December 1933 the Communists arrived and, according to information given orally by our confreres in the Vicariat, they tried to enter the orphanage. Fr. Anselmo took up position at the doorway using his great bulk to block entry and save the innocence of these little ones. But the attackers seized him by force and brought him off with them. There was no news of him for a year.

After twelve months, through a soldier of the "white" army sent to dislodge the "reds," it was learned that Fr. Anselmo had been decapitated in March 1934. His body, remaining unburied or almost so, fell victim to animals which snatched parts of it. Eventually it was recovered by the missionaries and buried in the cemetery of Kian.

2. *Fr. Sylvestre SOU, CM, Member of the Province of Southern China, born in Hoang-hoa-kiang (China) on 2 November 1912 and died on 9 September 1941.*

Fr. Sou was tortured in prison by the Communists for several years, but he remained faithful to the Pope and like a true martyr his death was courageously heroic: he was beaten to death in the presence of his native villagers.

The account which follows was given by his brother Fr. Lucas Sou, a priest still living in the diocese of Tan-Sham, in the presence, by way of witnesses, of Msgr Liou and his Vicar General.

"On the night of 7/8 September 1941 he was savagely beaten. Then he was asked: "Do you still believe in God?" He always replied: "Yes, I do believe." On 9 September 1941 during the night he suffered severe torture and abuse. At the end he said to his persecutors: "My body I give to you but I give my soul to God." The Communists buried him alive.

3. *Fr. James TCHAO, CM, Member of the Province of the Province of Northern China, born on 5 May 1909 in Tchong-ting-fou (China) and died on 16 September 1950 in Che-kia-tchoang.*

Fr. Tchao was put in prison in 1947. On 16 September 1950 he was condemned to death. Before the execution he was handcuffed and put up into a truck and made a spectacle before the crowds as he was driven through the streets of the town of Che-kia-tch'oang. The victim kept shouting "Long live the Church; long live the Pope; long live the Republic of China." He sang the Ave Maria in Latin and cried out: "Down with the Communists!" Then our confrere was decapitated, dying for the faith.

4. *Fr. Peter SOUEN, CM, Member of the Southern Province of China, born in Souenkiatchouang (China) on 11 November 1905 and died in Peking on 16 September 1951.*

In 1951 Fr. Peter Souen, director of the Seminary of Peking was thrown into prison. His chains were so tight that his wounds turned gangrenous. He died on 16 September 1951.

According to persons returned from Peking and a visit to their relatives in Continental China, people who were ill prayed at the tomb of Fr. Souen for cures which they obtained.

5. *Fr. Gui Tianjue, CM (Joseph Pierre Kwei) Member of the Province of the Western United States, born in Ying-tan (China) on 31 May 1902 and died at Linchwan on 22 May 1952. (1)*

Fr. Gui Tianjue (Joseph Kwei) was the first martyr of the diocese of Yujiang in the province of Jiangxi. The inscription on his tombstone says he died in 1953.

He was a Vincentian. After ordination he studied for a while in the United States. Before 1950 he worked in a Catholic church in Fuzhou, also in the province of Jiangxi. He founded the "True Light" secondary school, which he ran for over ten years. An American, Fr. Steven Dunker, CM, was one of his companions at that time. The present regime began in 1951. All priests and Christians were invited to join the Patriotic Association, which set up the Movement of Threefold Independence of the Church, at which time the police listed the false accusations against the American missionary, S. Dunker. Fr. Gui spoke up in defence of his companion and refused to join the Movement. He was therefore arrested and imprisoned, bringing his breviary with him.

The Christians brought him whatever he needed. All he would accept were raw vegetables. With the passage of time it became more and more difficult to visit him. Once a month the prison authorities accepted parcels brought by the Christians, but they never gave them to the prisoner. He died in 1953 but no one received permission to see his body. It was only sometime later that two Christians succeeded in finding it in a ditch and were able to bury it in the church cemetery.

Evidence of his pupils. Fr. Gui followed the example of Jesus. He lived poorly and willingly helped the poor. When he was a professor in the seminary he lived with the seminarists and like the seminarists. When he had to bring the sacraments to the Christians he prayed along the way. He always found time to do good to others. He knew a little Chinese medicine, which enabled him to help the sick poor. He had great humility. And, with all his learning, he carried out his ministry like a simple priest.

The first miracles after his death. During the ten years after his death many people came to pray at his grave and collect the herbs that grew there. The first person to receive a grace was the Christian Gong De. He had been present at the religious burial ceremony of Fr. Gui. He had a stomach ailment for years. He drank a brew made from herbs which grew on the priest's grave and was healed.

But the most astonishing case of a cure was that of a child in a pagan family. He was feverish and howled all day and all night. The mother, in desperation, came to pray at Fr. Gui's grave, and almost at once the child stopped crying and the fever abated.

Fr. Zeng, a curate in the diocese of Yujiang, was also cured of cancer after drinking a brew made from herbs collected on Fr. Gui's grave. That was in the spring of 1992. But the most significant thing is that, for more than 40 years, Fr. Gui's grave was a meeting place for liturgical celebrations by the Christians of the diocese of Yujiang. In order to put a stop to this popular devotion the government wrecked the tomb in the winter of 1992.

Many Christians who witnessed the profanation of the grave smelled a beautiful scent. In the open grave all that was found were some ornamental buttons, of a type commonly used in the 1950s.

Very little is known of Fr. Gui's life. The bishop called him: "The Martyr of Charity."

(1) In Omnis Terra, Pontifical Missionary Union Magazine, N_ 41, October-December 1994

6. Fr. Paul TCHANG, CM, Member of the Province of Northern China, born in Pang-kuin (China) on 11 October 1886 and died in Peking on 25 June 1954.

Fr. Paul Tchang was put in prison with Fr. Ignatius Ts'in, a priest of the diocese of Peking, the same day as Fr. Peter Souen, 25 July 1951. Fr. Tchang died on 26 June 1954 in Peking on the day he was freed from prison.

7. Msgr. Joseph CHOW T'SI-CHE, CM, Member of the Province of Northern China, born in the Vicariate of Tcheng-ting (China) on 8 November 1891 and died at Nan-chang in 1972.

In 1950, at Nanchang Jiangxi, it was the turn of the archbishop, Msgr. Joseph Chow T'si-che, CM, who taught Latin to Joseph Chow Chih-yi, CM, in the seminary. During their occupation of Mainland China, the Communists proposed to Msgr. Chow that they would have him appointed "Pope of the Patriotic Church of Communist China," with the intention of separating this so-called "patriotic" church from the Roman Catholic Church. One day some insidious Communist leaders contacted him and made known their intention in visiting him. But, Msgr. answered them with marvelous, even piquant adroitness, as follows: "Thank you for your visit. Your idea is praiseworthy, but it is impossible for me to be Pope of Communist China, since Communist China is too small to have a Pope. If you could propose me as Pope of the Universal Church, I would willingly accept. Otherwise, it is useless to discuss the matter." The Communists departed angrily; the archbishop was put under surveillance, and later imprisoned. He died in a forced-labour camp in 1972, after 22 years of imprisonment.

Archbishop Chow Tsi-che was twice a professor, in the minor seminary of Tcheng-ting and then philosophy professor in the major seminary of Chala, Peking. He was named Bishop of Gratia and Apostolic Vicar of Paoting, Hipeih by the decree of 26

March 1931, being consecrated at Paoting by Msgr. Montagne on 2 August. In 1946, named archbishop, he transferred to Nanchang, the Archdiocese of Nanchang, Kian-si.