

A Tale of Two Bishops

Tuesday, 05 February 2002

SHANGHAI -It's 8 a.m., and the dingy apartment building is momentarily unguarded. A woman sweeping her doorway across the street cranes her neck to watch the American walking hurriedly toward the home of her infamous neighbor. I knock, keeping my back to the police camera hidden in the hallway. An elderly man-not the one I've come to see-answers the door, surprised to see a Western face. "It is not good that you have come," he says nervously, protectively. A moment of confusion-should I leave? As I'm about to turn away, a voice from inside the apartment instructs the man to let me in. He does so but tells me not to stay long.

Dressed in a moth-eaten sweater and worn slippers, the 83-year-old Joseph Zhongliang Fan shuffles across his small, dingy apartment, guiding his unexpected visitor to a back room. He lives under virtual house arrest here, and Chinese State Security stands watch outside his residence, monitoring everything. As he slumps into a ratty old chair, it's hard to believe Communist authorities consider him one of the most dangerous men in China. His collar reminds me why: Fan is the Roman Catholic bishop of Shanghai and longtime deputy of the late, exiled Ignatius Pin-Mei Cardinal Kung, spiritual leader of China's eight to nine million underground Roman Catholics. Bishop Fan has spent most of his life in the Laogai-the Chinese gulag. On September 8, 1955, Father Fan and Bishop Kung were seized by Communist authorities along with hundreds of others in an overnight crackdown of the Shanghai diocese. Father Fan spent the next three decades in prison. His crime? Refusing to renounce the pope. After being released in 1985, he was ordained coadjutor bishop of Shanghai-second in command to Bishop Kung-ministering to Shanghai's underground Catholics while Kung remained under arrest (and later during Kung's exile in Connecticut). When Kung died in March 2000, Fan succeeded him as the rightful bishop of Shanghai. But Bishop Fan is forbidden to set foot in his cathedral, much less administer his diocese. His movements are restricted, and he's harassed for any communication with the outside world. It's virtually impossible to visit him. In fact, I'm the first Westerner to see him in many years-and I succeeded only because my visit caught the Chinese authorities by surprise. When a group of U.S. religious leaders (including Washington's Theodore Cardinal McCarrick) came to Shanghai in 1999, Bishop Fan says a phalanx of State Security agents arrived at his door. "They took me to a hotel and blocked the entrance with a line of cars" so the visiting delegation could not meet with him. The day after my visit, Chinese State Security interrogated the elderly man. A Long Legacy of Terror Bishop Fan is not alone in suffering harassment at the hands of state authorities; the persecution of underground Catholics in China is systematic, ongoing, and brutal. Bishops, nuns, priests, and laity are arrested, beaten-sometimes killed. Soon after my visit with Bishop Fan, 150 State Security agents swooped down on the home of his colleague, Archbishop Yang Shudao, and dragged him off to prison. On September 11, 1999, in the Fujian province, Rev. Ye Gong Feng was beaten into a coma by State Security agents who had surrounded his home. Two years before, Bishop Su Chimin of Baoding was arrested after hiding for 17 months from Chinese secret police. He hasn't been seen since. In 1999, while saying Mass at a private home in Beijing, Rev. Yan Weiping of Hebei was arrested by State Security forces and dragged off before the eyes of his horrified congregation. Later that night, his body was found on a Beijing street corner-he'd been beaten and thrown out of a window. And just three months ago, authorities arrested Bishop Lucas Li Jingfeng of Feng Xiang and a dozen priests, and closed a monastery and two convents. Today, numerous priests and bishops are missing or under arrest. The vicious Chinese regime not only arrests underground clergy, it systematically searches out and destroys underground churches. Since 1999, in one eastern province alone, Chinese authorities have torn down at least 1,200 churches. On October 25, 2001, they demolished one church in that province for the third time in just 18 months; each time they tore it down, the faithful came back and rebuilt it from the rubble. Bishop Fan and his compatriots could easily avoid this harassment and brutality-all they need to do is renounce the pope and join the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association. A parallel schismatic church set up by the Chinese Communists in 1957, the Patriotic Association's constitution declares autonomy from Rome, rejecting the supreme administrative, legislative, and judicial authority of the pope. In his 1954 encyclical, Ad Sinarum Gentem (To the Chinese People), Pope Pius XII warned Chinese Catholics that the new regime was "striving by every means in their power to establish among you a 'national Church' and declared that "this church, if it should come into being, would no longer be Catholic" because it refuses to "be subject in all things to the Sovereign Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth. "Before his trial, the Communist authorities offered Bishop Kung his freedom if he would agree to lead this new "Patriotic" church. He refused. "I am a Roman Catholic bishop," he declared. "If I renounce the Holy Father, not only would I not be a bishop, I would not even be Catholic." Yet some have chosen to do just that. While Bishop Fan is barred from entering his cathedral and taking his rightful place, another man occupies his chair. I needed to meet that man. The Counterfeit Bishop I follow my guide out of the elevator and through the VIP wing of the Shanghai hospital. While reserved for Communist Party cadres, the building is surprisingly nondescript. Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian is waiting for me. Dressed in pajamas and a Roman collar, he has a lovely smile and the warm, kind manner one would expect in a Catholic priest. He already knows my name (apparently, he has been briefed) and welcomes me in excellent English. He and Father Francis, a young Patriotic priest with him, lead me to a small sitting

room. We take a seat, and Jin grasps my hand, which he holds throughout the meeting, squeezing it from time to time to emphasize a point. When I ask him to explain the division between the Patriotic and underground Churches, he protests immediately: "There is no 'Patriotic' church. There is no 'official church' and 'underground church.' That is not true. There is only one Church in China-the Roman Catholic Church. Both are very loyal to the pope. Every day, I pray for the pope." Like Fan and Kung, Bishop Jin also spent many years in prison. An eighth-generation Chinese Catholic, he was ordained a Jesuit priest in 1945. After studying several years in Europe, Father Jin returned to Shanghai in 1950, where he served as a faithful collaborator of Bishop Kung. Sensing what was about to befall the Church, Kung scrambled to prepare as many young men for the priesthood as possible. He trusted Father Jin deeply enough to make him rector of the local seminary, giving him the responsibility of forming Shanghai's clergy. Those were terrifying days for the Church in China. The axe of persecution was soon to fall. In 1954, to confirm the loyalty of his flock in the face of the coming test, Bishop Kung led his priests and seminarians to the shrine of Our Lady of Sheshan. There, as one, they took an oath not to betray the faith. One year later, they were captured and imprisoned. Bishop Kung stood unbowed and was given a life sentence. Father Jin broke. Jesuit historian Rev. Lazlo Ladany writes in his book, *The Catholic Church in China*, that Father Jin received a reduced sentence for cooperating with Communist authorities: "The court verdict stated that he was given only 18 years because, while in jail, he was willing to reveal the 'crimes' of others." "Margaret Chu, a lay Catholic who spent 23 years in prison and labor camps, writes of the 1955 crackdown: "I was particularly shocked when I learned what my spiritual director, Father Aloysius Jin, S.J., had done after his arrest. He was a very eloquent priest...and had great influence among the faithful. Soon after he was arrested, he recorded a tape to persuade loyal Catholics to support the Communist government. This tape was used for broadcast in many prisons. Many of my friends heard this tape in jail." Jin must have come under enormous pressure. His prominent position made him, next to Bishop Kung, one of the prime targets of Communist authorities. Whatever he did after his arrest, he spent more than two decades in prison-including several years in labor camps-during which time he suffered greatly. But by 1985, the once-faithful priest agreed to be consecrated without papal authorization as a Patriotic bishop and incurred an automatic *latae sententiae* excommunication. Not only did he capitulate, but in 1988, he usurped Kung's rightful place as bishop of Shanghai. His betrayal was complete. By that time, Kung's life sentence had been commuted to ten years under house arrest. According to Rev. Raymond Dunn's account for the *National Catholic Register*, the man assigned to keep guard over Bishop Kung was none other than Bishop Jin. Kung's once-faithful collaborator had become his official jailer. As our discussion continues, Bishop Jin's resentment for those who remained loyal to Rome is clear. Asked why underground Catholics don't come above ground and worship with the Patriotic Association, he frowns: "Some in the underground Church are stubborn. If they emerge, they will lose prestige. Then they are not winners. They are losers." He becomes more animated. "They have a lot of support, from the U.S. and Taiwan. If they emerge, they lose control. Every underground priest has jurisdiction over all of China. They can go around and collect money.... The underground priests take the Mass stipend and put it in their pockets. After normalization, they would not be so free. They would have to remain inside their diocese. They prefer to remain an underground Church, because that way they enjoy lots of advantages. They have more freedom, more money, more prestige. They can say 'We are loyal to the pope!'" When I observe that they're also beaten and thrown out of windows by Chinese State Security, the bishop falls silent. His demeanor isn't nearly as harsh as his words, and it's hard to tell what he's saying for the benefit of those listening in on our conversation. Nevertheless, he seems to have little charity for the Catholics suffering in the underground. Indeed, Jin maintains that there is religious freedom in China. "During the Cultural Revolution, at that time there was no freedom at all. Now we have permission to practice our faith. I have reopened eight churches, and I have two seminaries, with 159 seminarians." Father Francis chimes in, "We can do anything we want. We can say Mass. We just can't do anything political." Bishop Jin recalls a meeting with then-Secretary of State Madeline Albright, in which she asked him and other religious leaders if their religious freedom was in any way limited. "All the others said no. But I said yes, it is limited: One, I can't go to Rome. And two, I can't run a Catholic university."

Listening to him as he talks about his seminary-the quality of its instruction in morals and dogma-or how he recently blessed a ship in the Shanghai harbor, one would think that Catholics worshiped freely in China and that the underground Church is suffering needlessly. But Bishop Jin's lack of empathy toward the members of the underground Church is, in some ways, understandable: They're doing what he wasn't brave enough to do. They're strong where he was weak. They fight on while he gave in. His is the resentment of the failed martyr. As we talk, it's difficult to reconcile the man before me with the words he's uttering. He looks like the stereotypical sweet, elderly priest. But his words are bitter-full of disdain for his suffering brothers and sisters who remained loyal to Rome. It's as if he must denigrate them-painting them as greedy and stubborn and proud-to justify the choices he made. For if they are not greedy and stubborn and proud-if they really are martyrs suffering for the faith-then what is he? Bishop Jin's separation from the tree of St. Peter has led him into heresy on doctrinal issues even beyond papal primacy-he supports birth control, for example. In an interview with the *Minneapolis Star*

Tribune last year, he declared, "Without family planning, there would be an explosion of the population in China. I am against abortion. Abortion is infanticide. I am for taking precautions." Such a statement by an American bishop would lead to sanction and correction. But Bishop Jin need not worry about correction

by his Patriotic Association-or by Rome. Yet in our meeting, Bishop Jin insists that he and all Chinese bishops are loyal to the pope in faith and morals. "In their hearts, all the bishops are loyal to the pope. Not all can say it. Some bishops are more afraid. But inside they are very loyal." "All are loyal, I ask?" "You are born in the U.S. You are free. We live in...." He stops. After a moment, he begins again. "The young people are not afraid," he says, pointing to Father Francis. "But I am still quite cautious. There is a Chinese proverb: 'The young calf has no fear of the tiger.' But old people are afraid of the tiger." "I couldn't shake the feeling he was telling me more about himself than the Church: He is weak. He is old. He is afraid. The Coming Spiritual Explosion? Not all old people are afraid of the tiger. Bishop Fan is in his 80s, and he has not given in. Many of the priests and bishops of the underground Church-those being arrested, tortured, and killed-are even older than he, yet they remain loyal.

So, too, do the majority of Chinese Catholics, who shun the Patriotic Association and worship underground at great risk. Ironically, it's not the persecuted Church, but the Chinese Communists who are afraid-fearful of frail, octogenarian priests like Bishop Fan. But why? Catholics are a tiny minority in this nation of more than one billion, and Bishop Fan and his geriatric colleagues hardly seem a threat to Communist authorities.

Nevertheless, their fears are valid. China is spiritual dry brush-a small spark could set off a giant spiritual brushfire. When the Communists took power, Mao Tse-tung supplanted the ancient Confucian moral and spiritual framework of the nation with a new moral code: Marxism-Leninism. Then, in the 1980s, China abandoned the mission of Marxism for the pursuit of the almighty dollar. Today, after decades of "capitalism with Chinese characteristics," no one believes in Marxism anymore. But thanks to decades of communism, the moral and spiritual foundation of the country has been destroyed. Hence the rapid spread of the Falun Gong spiritual movement, and the violent efforts of the Communist authorities to crush it, along with all religious groups independent of Party control. This fear is why China looks warily at the Vatican's determined entreaties to normalize relations. On one hand, the idea intrigues them. In exchange for recognition, Beijing would require that the Vatican break off official relations with Taiwan (something Rome has indicated it would do)-a major diplomatic victory. On the other hand, Beijing would have to recognize the legitimacy of underground Catholics and allow the pope to travel to China. A papal Mass in the heart of Beijing? One can see why the Communist authorities are hesitant.

In 1999, reports surfaced that normalization talks between Rome and Beijing were far along. But the Chinese side abruptly shut them down with the announcement that a dozen new Patriotic bishops would be consecrated without papal approval on January 6, 2000-the same day Pope John Paul II was scheduled to consecrate twelve new bishops in Rome. The consecration ploy backfired. All but three of the Patriotic priests balked, many of them disappearing in order to avoid the illicit consecrations. One hundred thirty Patriotic Association seminarians in Beijing refused to attend the illicit consecration, issuing a statement declaring that the "so-called ordination is against the principles of the faith and against the Catholic Church." Beijing authorities had to scramble to find two more priests to fill in, so as to have a respectable number. As the summer of 2000 was drawing to an end and talks were again progressing, the Patriotic Association announced another illicit ordination: Rev. Matthew Cao was to be consecrated as bishop of Hangzhou. This time the Vatican issued a stern warning that both the bishop being ordained and those performing the ordination would be automatically excommunicated. The ordination went ahead as scheduled on June 25, with Bishops Fu Teishan of Beijing, Yu of Haimen, and Wu of Nanching officiating. In October, China reacted with fury as Pope John Paul II canonized 120 Chinese martyrs. The ceremony took place on October 1-the feast of St. Thérèse of Lisieux (patroness of missions) but also China's national day. An invective-filled campaign against the canonization ensued. Rallies and symposia were held across the country exposing the "crimes" of the martyrs (such as raping Chinese women). Many Patriotic bishops participated in the protests. At a rally in Tiananmen Square, Beijing Bishop Fu Tieshan fumed that the canonization of "those so-called saints" was a "clear insult and humiliation."

But despite these repeated setbacks, the Vatican refuses to give up. In the fall of 2001, the Far Eastern Economic Review reported that soon "a series of carefully choreographed statements and meetings...will end decades of hostility" between Rome and Beijing. According to the report, in early October, Catholic scholars would gather in Beijing for a conference marking the 400th anniversary of the arrival of Italian missionary Rev. Matteo Ricci in China. Then, later that same month, Bishop Fu (the excommunicated head of the Patriotic Association) was to arrive in Rome for a ceremony celebrating the Ricci anniversary, where the pope would "offer some form of apology for historical wrongdoing by the Catholic Church in China." Bishop Fu never showed up. But the pope did deliver a carefully worded statement promising that "the Catholic Church seeks no privilege from China and its leaders, but solely the resumption of dialogue in order to build a relationship based on mutual respect." Furthermore, he apologized for the fact that "the work of members of the Church in China was not always without error."

It was an extraordinary olive branch extended toward Beijing. So far, however, Beijing hasn't reciprocated. Reconciling Judas

While it patiently woos Beijing, the Vatican works quietly to reconcile the wayward priests and bishops of the Patriotic Association with the universal Church. In his biography of John Paul II, Witness to Hope, George Weigel recounts how in 1987, Jaime Cardinal Sin of Manila became the first leader of the universal Church to visit China since the Communist Revolution. "[H]e found clergy and laity from the Patriotic Catholic Association [sic] pressing slips of paper into his hand, asking Sin to tell the Pope they loved him and were praying for him." In the years since, the Vatican has reportedly received a number of communications from Patriotic bishops repenting and professing their loyalty to the pope. Some have been recognized by the Holy Father, though their names and number are a closely held secret. Last year, for the first time, an official bishop was reportedly consecrated with prior papal approval. In Taiwan (where Chinese Catholics worship freely), Paul Cardinal Shan compares the situation in China to the English Reformation in the 16th century. At that time, a schism over papal authority led to a permanent breach between Rome and the English Church that has lasted more than five centuries.

The Vatican desperately wants to prevent a similar permanent breach between Rome and the Church in China. But it's a delicate balancing act. If the Vatican acknowledges Patriotic bishops within the official structures of the Patriotic Association, then what did Cardinal Kung, Bishop Fan, and the thousands of priests, bishops, and lay martyrs suffer for all those years? Couldn't they have given in and avoided so many decades of pain and persecution? And why should millions of loyal Catholics continue to suffer in the underground today, if they can join the Patriotic Association and still be Catholics in good standing? In 1988, the Vatican issued an advisory to its bishops throughout the world on dealing with Patriotic Association priests and bishops. It urged that they be approached with "fraternal charity" but also "doctrinal clarity" and made clear that on "delicate points" of the liturgical celebrations "all 'communicatio in sacris' is to be avoided. The 'patriotic' bishops and priests are not to be invited or even allowed to celebrate religious functions in public, either in the churches or in the oratories of the various religious institutes." This directive has never been rescinded. Indeed, when Cardinal McCarrick visited China in 1998, he said, "I was not able to celebrate Mass in any of these (Patriotic) churches, in that they are not in communion with the Holy See. I celebrated Mass every day of my 18 days in China in my hotel room."

Moreover, Pope John Paul II has repeatedly declared, as he did in a 1994 letter to Chinese Catholics and at the 1995 World Youth Day celebrations in Manila, that "a Catholic who wishes to remain such and be recognized as such cannot reject the principle of communion with the successor of Peter."

In December 1994, the underground bishops, at great personal risk, issued a pastoral letter in which they declared "those bishops and clerics belonging to this new church [the Patriotic Association]...are no longer members of the Catholic Church. No member of the clergy of the Universal Church is permitted to be in sacramental communion with them." Yet many Catholics in the United States openly reject Rome's careful distinctions and the express wishes of the legitimate Chinese bishops, embracing Patriotic Association priests, bishops, and seminarians as if they were in full communion with the Church. Many religious communities and Catholic charitable organizations raise funds for them and send members to China to work in Patriotic Association churches. According to the magazine 30 Days, some \$4.7 million has been donated to the Patriotic Association by Catholic religious communities like the Maryknoll Missionaries. The Jesuits helped finance a \$1.2 million retreat center in Shanghai for Bishop Jin. Meanwhile, the loyal underground bishops who are unable to travel, network, and solicit funds receive nothing. None of this fazed Cardinal Kung. "In China, we have no well-furnished libraries for our unofficial seminaries," he told an interviewer in 1998, a year before his death. "But material means are not the only way to nourish the faith. The faith of our seminarians and laity grows through the good example of their aged priests and bishops. Their faith grows through daily prayer and sacrifice. This is why we have an ever-increasing number of vocations in China." The underground Church's main source of support and contact with the outside world is the Cardinal Kung Foundation, in Stamford, Connecticut. Led by Joseph Kung, the late cardinal's dedicated nephew, the foundation keeps track of the missing, killed, and arrested; reports incidents of oppression; and supports the underground dioceses and seminarians. But the financial support for the Patriotic Association from groups like the Jesuits and Maryknolls far exceeds what the tiny Cardinal Kung Foundation can do for the loyal, suffering majority. In many ways, the crisis in China mirrors the situation of the Church during the Roman persecution of the first and second centuries. At that time, Roman authorities also made examples of the bishops—they were imprisoned, crucified, burned at the stake, or torn apart by animals. To avoid this, all the bishops had to do was pay homage to the emperor. Saints like Ignatius of Antioch refused to submit, and suffered a martyr's death in the Coliseum. Others buckled and, like the Patriotic bishops of today, renounced their faith to save their lives. Many of them repented and tried to return to the universal Church (they were known as the Lapsi). A great controversy ensued about whether to readmit them. Some argued that the Lapsi should never be readmitted; others that they should be brought back but denied the sacraments. Finally, after much debate, the Church welcomed them home—but only gradually, and after a long period of penance. This episode may provide a model for the reconciliation of China's Catholics. Undying Hope Bishop Fan and Bishop Jin met last year to discuss the choice of a successor ("We are both very old," Bishop Fan says with a wry smile). A

sign of hope for future unity? Yes and no. They couldn't agree on a candidate. Yet none of these difficulties seems to faze Bishop Fan. When asked about the possibility of normalization between Rome and Beijing, he doesn't go into a long discourse on "winners" and "losers." Instead, he answers simply and plainly: "I will do whatever the Holy Father tells me to do." As I get up to leave his small, guarded apartment, the old and gentle bishop blesses me, pressing a prayer card into my hand. "Pray for the Church in China," he says. "Pray."

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By M.A. Thiessen, who is a writer living in Washington, D.C. The reached at www.cardinalkungfoundation.org.

Cardinal Kung Foundation can be