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Recommended Citation

Clark, Anthony E. , "China's Preeminent Bishop Has Died: Aloysius Jin Luxian, SJ (1916-2013)" Whitworth University (2013).
History Faculty Scholarship. Paper 35.
<http://digitalcommons.whitworth.edu/historyfaculty/35>

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China's Preeminent Bishop Has Died: Aloysius Jin Luxian, SJ (1916-2013)
By Anthony E. Clark, Ph.D.

Requiem ætérnam dona eis; et lux perpetua líceat eis.

China's most famous – and most powerful – Catholic bishop has died. When I last saw him in 2011, I knew then that age was finally catching up with Shanghai's remarkable and indefatigable prelate. As we sat together I handed him a pile of rare photographs of him and his fellow Jesuits, images that dated before his arrest in 1955. Pausing for some time as he looked over the first photograph, he said in a low voice: "old beloved friends." He had not seen those faces in over six long and eventful decades. He asked me to bring more photographs of "Catholic Shanghai before the Communists"; I do have more images to give him, but now he is perhaps seeing the real faces of his "beloved friends," and I will file them away for posterity. Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian, SJ (1916-2013), is one of the most gentle and charming people I have met, and he is also among the most enigmatic, and as I thumb through his dossier I vacillate between admiration, disagreement, speculation, and sometimes disappointment. As I entitled my 2010 interview with Bishop Jin for *Ignatius Insight*, with Jin there are "No Easy Answers." I would like to offer a few remarks here about why Bishop Jin's recent death is probably one of the most noteworthy events in the history of Catholicism in China.

Jin Luxian lived through China's most dramatic changes and growing pains as it transitioned from empire to the largest and most paradoxical Communist country in the history of our world. He witnessed China's war with Japan (1930s); the fierce and tragic war between his own countrymen, the Nationalists and Communists (1920s-1949); the rise of Mao Zedong and Maoism in 1949; the turbulent 100 Flowers Movement (1956)

and the following Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957-1958); the Great Leap Forward and the millions of deaths it caused (1958-1961); the cruel violence of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976); the post-Mao economic boom inaugurated by Deng Xiaoping (1989-present); and this long list of China's landmark events does not include equally dramatic events in Catholic history, such as the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Because he was a Jesuit priest who had earned his doctorate in theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Jin was labeled a "dangerous counterrevolutionary" in alliance with an "imperialist power," the Vatican. Jin Luxian's life provides historians extraordinary access to some of the world's most exceptional moments of transformation, and if you ask China's Catholics who has been the most influential figure in their Church's remarkable survival and seemingly-impossible growth through their country's painful birth as a Communist superpower, they will, to the person, reply, "Bishop Jin."

On my desk as I write this essay lay two handsome photo-histories of the Diocese of Shanghai replete with images of Bishop Jin, a massive 750-page collection of his homilies, a French biography of his life, *Le Pape Jaune: Mgr. Jin Luxian, Soldat de Dieu en Chine Communiste*, or "The Yellow Pope: Bishop Jin Luxian, Soldier of God in Communist China," countless Chinese liturgical books that he has either written himself or sponsored, and the recently-published copy of his personal memoirs, to which I wrote the introduction. Books by or about him can fill a bookcase, and anyone who has made a tour of "Catholic Shanghai" cannot but notice that Bishop Jin singlehandedly solicited enough funds from all over the globe to restore Shanghai's numerous churches, build a new seminary, and commission the construction of many other Catholic facilities, including a busy retreat house for China's overworked clergy. Catholic Shanghai is Jin's

Shanghai, and his new rectory towers over his cathedral, named after Saint Ignatius, the founder of his Order.

The Complexities of Survival

Many Catholics have asked; how did Bishop Jin manage to build a Catholic empire in Shanghai under the watchful eye of a Communist government vowed to “help religion along the natural path of withering away”? When I once asked him how he explained his successful efforts to revitalize the Church in China while also maintaining a cozy relationship with the Communist Party, he answered: “I am both a serpent and a dove. The government thinks I’m too close to the Vatican, and the Vatican thinks I’m too close to the government. I’m a slippery fish squashed between government control and Vatican demands.” For better or worse, Bishop Jin Luxian’s priority was the survival of Catholicism in China, and he maintained connections with an enormous array of personalities. He kept a wide range of company; in one photograph he is pictured at Rice University with his friend, the dissident theologian Hans Küng, in another he is seen giving Holy Communion to Mother Teresa, and in yet another photo Jin is shown meeting with President Bill Clinton. While there can be little doubt that he was able to use his connections to preserve and promote the Church in China, Jin’s decisions were not always popular with Rome.

When he accepted his office as bishop of Shanghai in 1988, he did so without the approval of the Holy See. In his “Acceptance of Office and Promise of Fidelity,” Bishop Jin pronounced, “I believe all the teachings on faith in the Holy Church. . . . I will try my best to take care of the spiritual and material needs of the clergy and faithful.” And then

he promised to “observe the Constitutions and Laws of the People’s Republic of China,” and offer his life for God and the “independent and autonomous Diocese of Shanghai” (Jesuit Archives of Taipei, Jin Luxian File). While rendering his obedience to the Constitutions and Laws of the Communist government of China, he was at the same time writing countless letters to foreign bishops, describing the political persecution under which Chinese Catholics suffer, and asking for generous donations to rebuild the Chinese Church. One of his patent lines in letters to solicit even a small donation was, “Many streams make a large river” (Jesuit Archives, Taipei: letter to Cardinal Jaime L. Sin [1928-2005], 19 January 1997). One, such as myself, cannot help but have mixed feelings knowing that Jin made public concessions to China’s oppressive and anti-religious government, while at the same time I know I am kneeling in prayer in a Shanghai church that was funded and restored through Jin’s efforts.

Even as one considers Jin Luxian’s collaboration with China’s authorities and the Communist-overseen Catholic Patriotic Association, anyone with sympathy for human suffering must acknowledge his herculean resolution to survive decades of sustained Communist imprisonment, bullying, and “reeducation.” In the 1950’s, Shanghai’s Party officials launched an unpitying attack against the city’s popular bishop, Ignatius Gong Pinmei (1901-2000). On the evening of 8 September 1955, the Shanghai police made a wide sweep through the city’s Catholic residences. Father Jin was at home reading a book at 9:30 pm, when plain clothed officers forced themselves into his room and arrested the unsuspecting priest. As he recalled his arrest: “The Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary was 8 September 1955, which was also the anniversary of my vows” (*Memoirs* (Hong Kong: 2012), 206). He was rebuked, as was his fellow prisoner, Bishop

Gong Pinmei, as a “stinking old nine intellectual” and a “parasite” of the People. He began his tireless work to restore the Church in China after his release from prison, when he was sixty-six years old, and he adhered to the Jesuit motto, *Magis*, “More,” until his death a few days ago, at the age of ninety-seven.

In the preface of his *Memoirs*, which he wrote when he was ninety-two years old, Bishop Jin wrote: “When I close my eyes and think back, those years have truly passed in an instant, but on close examination this instant was full of hardship” (*Memoirs*, 1). Whether or not his methods were correct – only God is the rightful judge of souls – his life has not been one of comfort and selfishness; Jin Luxian, if anything, lived as a Catholic priest. There is much about Bishop Jin’s actions that many loyal Catholics may not comfortably condone, but none of us is without sin and complexity. Every time we met, Jin was unselfish with his time, and spoke with warmth and kindness. As I wrote in my introduction to his *Memoirs*, “Jin Luxian has been identified as a politician, protector and prisoner, but he would simply refer to himself as a priest; and in a final word, Jin as always been, and remains, a priest” (*Memoirs*, xx). There is little doubt that the Church in China has flourished under his leadership, as priest, bishop, and administrator. One of his favorite sayings of Saint Ignatius, the holy founder of the Jesuits, was, “*Oportet illum crescere, me autem minui*,” “He should grow and I should diminish.” Bishop Jin has gone, but I suspect that his greatest wish would be for the Church he left behind to continue to grow, even as his memory diminishes into history.

Photographs Key:

Photographs courtesy of the Province of China Archive of the Society of Jesus, Taipei, France, and Anthony E. Clark Private Collection.

- 001: Fr. Aloysius Jin Luxian, SJ, as a young Jesuit (ca. 1940s).
- 002: Fr. Aloysius Jin Luxian, SJ, at his birthday celebration in Shanghai (1954).
- 003: Jesuit group photo in Shanghai: Bishop Ignatius Gong Pinmei is wearing a pectoral cross, and Fr. Jin stands to his right (1953).
- 004: Official photograph of the “Gong Pinmei Counterrevolutionary Trial,” held in Shanghai, 17 March 1960. Fr. Jin is bowing forward in light clothing, and Bishop Gong sits directly to Jin’s left.
- 005: Bishop Jin Luxian, SJ, at the celebration Mass in Shanghai, commemorating 400 years of Catholicism in Shanghai (2008).
- 006: Dr. Anthony Clark with Bishop Jin Luxian, SJ, at his private residence in Shanghai (2012).