



He Never Left His Flock Unattended

The Legion Of Mary Remembering Their Bishop

By Bernadette Chien, Class of 1949; Philommena Hsieh, 1950; and Rose Hu, 1951



(Note: This article was written to Cardinal Kung by three former Legionaries of Mary of the Shanghai Diocese. The article was published on July 31, 1999 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the persecution of the Roman Catholic Church in China and to honor Cardinal Kung's 98th birthday, the 20th anniversary of being elevated to the Sacred College of Cardinals, the 50th anniversary of episcopal ordination, and the 70th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood. From the pens of his flock, this article illustrated the leadership of Bishop Kung in the Shanghai Diocese and the life and faith of his flock during the initial 5 years of his episcopacy under the pressure and persecution of the Chinese communist government. Bishop Kung was arrested on September 8, 1955 and remained in jail until 1988.)



In 1948, just before China turned communist, Fr. W. Aedan McGrath, a Columban Father and a Concilium Representative of the Legion of Mary, was asked to start the Legion in Shanghai. Some priests were skeptical. "We already have many lay Catholic organizations doing similar works. After all, what could these high school boys and girls accomplish?" But Bishop Ignatius Kung, bishop of Shanghai, thought otherwise. He strongly believed that the Catholic youth would be the hope and future of the Church. The youth was willing to make sacrifice to defend their faith and their Church.

With Bishop Kung's enthusiastic support, Fr. McGrath started the Legion of Mary in Aurora High School for girls. The Legion began with two praesidia (chapters), and increased quickly to six. More than 95% of Catholic students became active members. Other Catholic high schools and parishes followed closely. It was indeed God's wonderful plan. Though weak and incapable, we were His chosen ones. With Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces, the Legionaries actively engaged

in evangelization in homes, schools and parishes, while building a "Great Wall" with our tears and sufferings to defend our Mother, the Church.

From its beginning, the Chinese communist government was determined to persecute the Church. We expected that it would first strike at our bishop, priests, and nuns. Most unexpectedly, we found ourselves as its first target. Maybe the government did not think a new organization would have a solid foundation. Maybe it expected teenagers to succumb under pressure and assault easily. The government hoped that if the Legion of Mary fell, it would start a "domino effect" and cause the collapse of other Catholic organizations. Then the whole Roman Catholic Church in China would fall also.

On October 8, 1951, the Legion of Mary was condemned on the front pages of newspapers across the country as "running dogs of the U.S. imperialists under the cloak of religion, and an anti-revolutionary, subversive organization." It must be disbanded. The Military Affairs Control Committee ordered the Legionaries to denounce the Legion of Mary and to register with the government. All at once the Legion became China's "public enemy number one." We were under pressure from all sides. We were like mice crossing the street open to the abuse of everyone. On the one hand, registration would acknowledge that the Legion of Mary was a political, subversive organization. Registration also required turning over the list of members. On the other hand, refusing to do so would mean losing one's job or being expelled from schools.

Under the divine protection of our Blessed Mother and the leadership of Bishop Kung, the majority of Legionaries refused to register. Many lost their jobs and were expelled from schools. Some families were exiled to remote, barren provinces, never to return. Many members who were converts were pressured by their non-Catholic parents to register. Yet the Legionaries stood firm; they chose to suffer for God's sake.

To show our resoluteness to live our faith, some of us wrote a joint letter to Bishop Kung and signed our names with blood from our fingers. We each packed a small package of personal effects, ready to be arrested. Fr. Matthew His Pin Chang said, "You suffered the scourging. I feel for the price that you paid deep in my heart. Dear Legionaries, you and your family's tears are the pearls that form the crown of our Blessed Mother. Your suffering form the bouquet of roses for Holy Mary. You have won the first battle. However, be vigilant and pray. The devils will not give up easily."

After the Legion was disbanded by the government, Bishop Kung organized religious study groups for Catholic students to strengthen their spiritual life through catechism studies, meditations, and daily Masses. Meanwhile, the Catholic youth groups continued to be the right hands of the pastors. We were known as "The Catholic Youths of the 50's." Our enthusiasm did not escape the wrath of the government. On September 8, 1955, hundreds of us were arrested together with our dear Bishop Kung. It was an honor to be chosen by Christ to share in a very small way his suffering. We would never denounce our Church or our bishop.

Looking back, the anti-Christ forces seemed overwhelming, yet everything was firmly controlled in God's hands. By the grace of God, we remained faithful to the act of consecration that we took as Legionaries, "I am all yours, my Queen, my Mother, and all that I have is yours." We never regretted our promises. As high school students and graduates, we all had big dreams. These

dreams were shattered after October 8, 1951. We offered our youth and our worldly future to our Blessed Mother. All we have and own is from God. We give to God what belongs to God.

We specially remembered Francis T.S. Shen, president of the Senates of the Legion of Mary in Shanghai. He was one of the first to be arrested in 1951. Initially, he was sentenced to twelve years imprisonment. Later, in 1960, the Communist conducted a public trial and sentenced him to death for preaching the gospel to fellow inmates. He was publicly executed in November 1963. Francis Shen won a crown of martyrdom for the Legion of Mary and for China.

During those most difficult years, Bishop Kung vigorously prepared us for our role in the diocese: He taught us and encouraged us by his own examples. He never left his flock unattended. Priests and faithful followed him. The diocese in Shanghai set an outstanding example of fidelity to the Holy See for the Universal Church.

Today, we thank our dear bishop for being a faithful shepherd who was ready to lay down his life for his flock. He accepted life imprisonment rather than the worldly comfort and honor as a leader in the Patriotic Association. We congratulate our bishop, now a prince of the Church, Cardinal Ignatius Kung, on his 70th, 50th, and 20th Triple anniversaries. With gratitude, reverence and prayers, we wish him a happy 99th* birthday. We kneel before him and ask for blessings on his spiritual children of Shanghai.

*Please note that in the Chinese tradition the day of birth is counted as the 1st birthday. Therefore, what was commonly known as Cardinal Kung's 98th birthday here in the US, was considered to be his 99th birthday among his Chinese friends and admirers.