



The Cardinal Kung Foundation

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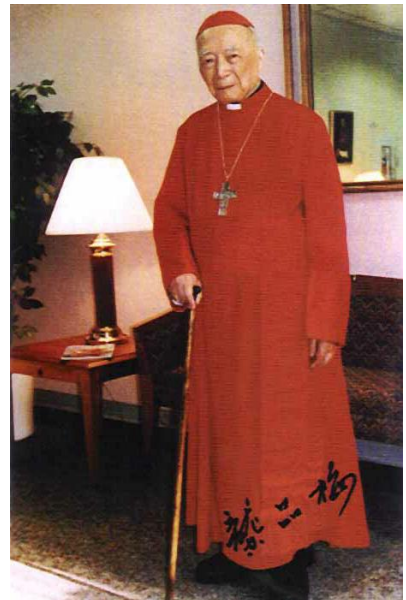
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Obituary - Ignatius Cardinal Kung Pinmei



Stamford, Connecticut, U.S.A. - His Eminence, Ignatius Cardinal KUNG Pinmei died at 3:05 AM on March 12, 2000. He was 98 years of age.

Cardinal Kung was the Roman Catholic Bishop of Shanghai, and the Apostolic Administrator of Souchou and Nanking since 1950, a post he held until his death. He was ordained a priest almost 70 years ago on May 28, 1930, consecrated a Bishop 50 years ago - the first native Chinese Bishop of Shanghai - on the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary October 7, 1949 after the communists had already taken over China. Cardinal Kung was created a Cardinal by Pope John Paul II in pectore (in the heart of the Pope, without announcement to anyone in the world including Cardinal Kung) 20 years ago in 1979 at the age of 78 when the Cardinal was serving a life sentence in isolation in China. Living in the heart of Pope John Paul II for 12 years, Cardinal Kung was finally proclaimed a cardinal to the world on June 28, 1991 by Pope John Paul II. At the time of Cardinal's death, Cardinal Kung was the oldest Cardinal.



The story of Cardinal Kung is the story of a faithful shepherd and of a hero. Cardinal Kung was a man who refused to renounce God and his Church despite the consequences of a life sentence from the Chinese communist government. The months before his arrest in 1955, the then Bishop Kung stood by his clergy and faithful of China in spite of many offers of safe passage out of China. He was a man who inspired millions of his countrymen

to follow his example of fidelity to the Roman Catholic faith and who preserved the Roman Catholic Church in a communist country for the past 50 years. He was a man who became a symbol for world leaders in all countries in their fight for religious freedom. No account of religious persecutions or of any human rights violations in China is complete without a few words about His Eminence Cardinal Kung.

Bishop Kung had been Bishop of Shanghai and Apostolic Administrator of two other dioceses for only five years before he was arrested by the Chinese government. In just 5 short years, Bishop Kung became one of the most feared enemies of the Chinese Communists - a man who commanded both the attention and devotion of the country's then three million Roman Catholics and the highest respect of his brother bishops in China, and inspired thousands to offer their lives up to God. In defiance of the communist created and sanctioned Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, Bishop Kung personally supervised the Legion of Mary, a religious organization of the laity dedicated to the veneration of the Blessed Mother Mary. As the result, many members of the Legion of Mary chose to risk arrest in the name of their God, of their Church and of their bishop. Hundreds of Legion of Mary members, including many students, were arrested and sentenced to 10, 15, or 20 years or more of hard labor.

In the midst of persecutions, Bishop Kung declared 1952 the Marian Year in Shanghai. During that year, there was to be uninterrupted 24 hours-daily recitation of the rosary in front of a statue of Our Lady of Fatima, which toured all the parishes of Shanghai. The Holy Statue finally arrived at Christ the King Church where a major arrest of the priests had just taken place only a month ago. Bishop Kung visited that church and personally led the rosary while hundreds of the armed police looked on. At the end of the rosary, leading the congregation, Bishop Kung prayed: "Holy Mother, we do not ask you for a miracle. We do not beg you to stop the persecutions. But we beg you to support us who are very weak."

Knowing that he and his priests would soon be arrested, Bishop Kung trained hundreds of catechists to pass on the Roman Catholic faith in the diocese to future generations. The heroic efforts of these catechists, their martyrdom and that of many faithful and clergy contributed to the vibrant underground Roman Catholic Church in China today. Bishop Kung's place in the hearts of his parishioners was very well summed up by the Shanghai youth group in 1953 new year youth rally when they said: "Bishop Kung, in darkness, you light up our path. You guide us on our treacherous journey. You sustain our faith and the traditions of the Church. You are the foundation rock of our Church in Shanghai."

On September 8, 1955, the press around the world reported in shock the overnight arrest of Bishop Kung along with more than 200 priests and Church leaders in Shanghai. Months after his arrest, he was taken out to a mob "struggle session" in the old Dog Racing stadium in Shanghai. Thousands were ordered to attend and to hear the Bishop's public confession of his "crimes." With his hands tied behind his back, wearing a Chinese pajama suit, the 5-foot tall bishop was pushed forward to the microphone to confess. To the shock of the security police, they heard a righteous loud cry of "Long live Christ the King, Long live the Pope" from the Bishop. The crowd responded immediately, "Long live Christ the King, Long live Bishop Kung". Bishop Kung was quickly dragged away to the police car and disappeared from the world until he was brought to trial in 1960. Bishop Kung was sentenced to life imprisonment.

The night before he was brought to trial, the Chief Prosecutor asked once again for his cooperation to lead the independent church movement and to establish the Chinese Patriotic Association. His answer was: "I am a Roman Catholic Bishop. If I denounce the Holy Father, not only would I not be a Bishop, I would not even be a Catholic. You can cut off my head, but you can never take away my duties."

Bishop Kung vanished behind bars for thirty years. During those thirty years, he spent many long periods in isolation. Numerous requests to visit Bishop Kung in prison by international religious and human rights organizations and senior foreign government officials were rejected. He was not permitted to receive visitors, including his relatives, letters, or money to buy essentials, which are rights of other prisoners.

The efforts for his release by his family, led by his nephew, Joseph Kung, by human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, Red Cross, and the United States Government, never ceased. In 1985, he was released from jail to serve another term of 10 years of house arrest under the custody of those Patriotic Association bishops who betrayed him and betrayed the Pope and who usurped his diocese. In an article immediately after his release from jail, the New York Times said that the ambiguous wording of the Chinese news agency suggested that the authorities, not the bishop, might have relented. After two and one-half years of house arrest, he was officially released. However, his charge of being a counterrevolutionary was never exonerated. In 1988, his nephew, Joseph Kung, went to China twice and obtained permission to escort him to America for receiving proper medical care.

Shortly before Bishop Kung was released from jail, he was permitted to join a banquet organized by the Shanghai government to welcome His eminence Cardinal Jaime Sin, Archbishop of Manila, Philippines on a friendship visit. This was the first time that Bishop Kung had met a visiting bishop from the universal Church since his imprisonment. Cardinal Sin and Bishop Kung were seated on opposite ends of the table separated by more than 20 Communists, and had no chance to exchange words privately. During the dinner, Cardinal Sin suggested that each person should sing a song to celebrate. When the time came for Bishop Kung to sing, in the presence of the Chinese government officials and the Patriotic Association bishops, he looked directly at Cardinal Sin and sang "Tu es Petrus et super hanc petram aedificabo Ecclesiam" (You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church), a song of faith proclaiming the supreme authority of the Pope. Bishop Kung conveyed to Cardinal Sin that in all his years of captivity he remained faithful to God, to his Church and to the Pope.

After the banquet, Aloysius Jin, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association's Bishop of Shanghai, rebuked Cardinal Kung, "What are you trying to do? Showing your position?" Cardinal Kung quietly answered, "It is not necessary to show my position. My position has never changed."

Cardinal Sin immediately carried Cardinal Kung's message to the Holy Father and announced to the world: this man of God never faltered in his love for his Church or his people despite unimaginable suffering, isolation and pain.

The late Bishop Walter Curtis, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Bridgeport, Connecticut at that time, invited Bishop Kung to stay with the retired clergy of the Bridgeport Diocese upon his arrival in the United States. He remained a guest of the Diocese - later headed by Bishop Edward Egan - for 9 years until December 1997.

When Pope John Paul II presented Cardinal Kung with his red hat in the Consistory on June 29, 1991 in the Vatican, the 90 year old Bishop Kung raised himself up from the wheelchair, put aside his cane and walked up the steps to kneel at the foot of the Pontiff. Visibly touched, the Holy Father lifted him up, gave him his cardinal's hat, then stood patiently as Cardinal Kung returned to his wheelchair to the sounds of an unprecedented seven-minute standing ovation from 9000 guests in the Audience Hall in the Vatican.

During the past twelve years, Cardinal Kung offered public Masses in many parishes, in Catholic conferences and on TV, gave interviews and homilies in the United States to bring the attention of the free world to the continued persecutions on the Roman Catholic Church in China. He remained the inspiration of the 9-10 million underground Roman Catholics in China and the hated enemy of the Chinese communist government. In an interview with the Chinese Press in New York on February 12, 1998, Mr. Ye Xiaowen, the Director of the Religious Bureau of China, stated: "Kung Pin Mei committed a serious crime by dividing the country and causing harm to its people." One month later in March, 1998, the Chinese government confiscated the passport of this then 97 year old Cardinal Kung, officially exiling him.

Cardinal Kung never ceased inviting prayers for those who had separated and joined the communist established Patriotic Association. Prior to his trip to Rome to attend the Consistory in 1991, Bishop Kung addressed China through the airwaves of Voice of America, inviting the Patriotic bishops to return to the Eternal City with him.

In his *Mission* magazine in 1957, Bishop Fulton Sheen wrote: "The West has its Mindszenty, but the East has its Kung. God is glorified in His saints."