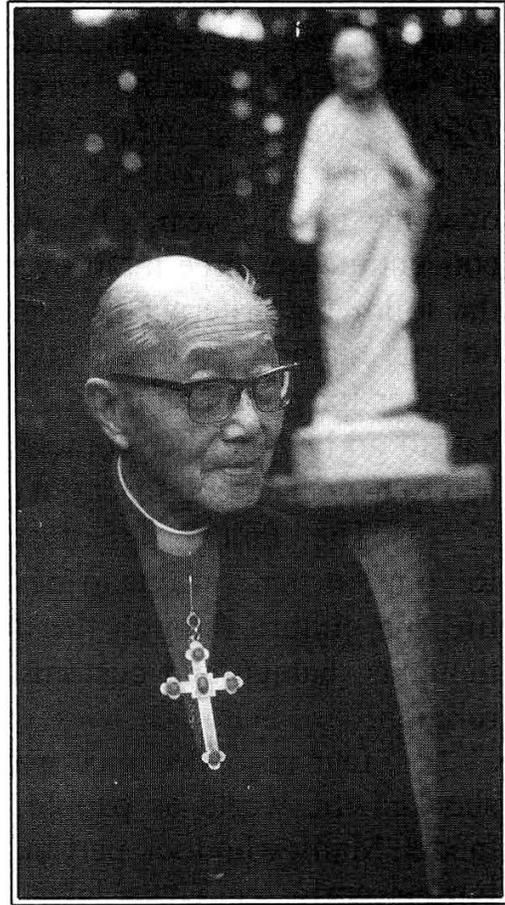


I. Darkness Covered the Land: The Cultural Revolution 1966-1976

By nature Bishop Zhang Jiashu, S.J., was a gentle man who, in his own quiet way, always tried to please everyone. He had studied in France, but he had no real social standing at home in China. In 1960 the Catholic Patriotic Association chose this unassuming man as bishop of Shanghai. Surely, he would never give anyone any trouble; he was always eager to please people; he would be compliant. Strangely enough, during the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards seized him and accused him of being a rebel. They paraded him through the streets wearing a large placard around his neck, subjected him to numerous humiliations and endless daily criticism sessions, and finally to a public trial. The case of Bishop Zhang Jiashu is not an isolated one. It was run of the mill for church people, professionals and other intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution.



Bishop Zhang of Shanghai died on February 25, 1988.

The Cultural Revolution

On October 1, 1999, China celebrated the 50th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic and the beginning of Communist rule in China. The Cultural Revolution is certainly one of the major events that has shaped that period.

In 1966, Mao Zedong, hoping to revive the revolutionary spirit, and further his own political ambitions, launched the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Through this vast mass

movement, he wanted to convince people to adopt his ideas rather than those of his opponents within the Party. To do this, he mobilized rebel groups to attack the leaders within the Party with whom he was dissatisfied. These rebel groups or Red Guards became the vanguard of the Cultural Revolution. In the fall of 1966, some 13 million Red Guards assembled in Beijing for rallies in support of Mao. They then dispersed throughout China and set about attacking the “four olds” (ideology, thought, habits, customs).

The Cultural Revolution brought about an earthshaking change in all of China, shattered the dreams of Communist youth, nearly destroyed the splendor of Chinese culture, and sacrificed the treasures of its classical literature for Mao’s “Little Red Book.” It also nearly snuffed out a church that was already on the verge of extinction.

The Cultural Revolution and the Church

A great deal of the furor of the Cultural Revolution fell directly on the church and principally on those church leaders who had always cooperated with the government. Since the mid-fifties, many church leaders had made a number of compromises to stay on the right side of the government. They hoped in so doing, to insure the church’s survival. They had relied on the Chinese Communist Party to survive and now the Party itself was going under. So-called Revolutionary Committees were taking over all the functions of the Party on the provincial, city, and local levels. The Party was paralyzed and the church could no longer rely on it for protection.

Bishop Zhang was not the only church leader to be led down the streets in disgrace. All church leaders who had relied on the government were made to undergo self-criticisms at public sessions. They were accused of being the remnant of feudalistic superstition and the tails of Western imperialism. The placards they wore around their necks identified them as ox ghosts and snake spirits. Bishops, priests, Sisters and even seminarians were tortured, beaten, and imprisoned. Old priests were even made to kneel on broken glass.

On their rampage the Red Guards looted libraries and private homes, seized Bibles, all religious books and classics and burned them in huge bonfires that sometimes lasted for several days. They tore down crucifixes, smashed beautiful stained glass windows, broke statues and confiscated religious articles. They closed churches, temples, and schools, and converted them into warehouses,

factories, homes for cadres or for other government use. Some churches and temples were even completely demolished. All religious activity stopped and church leaders of all religions were arrested and sent to prisons, labor camps or farms. Many became completely demoralized. Bishops and priests who were forced to marry took Sisters for their wives. Many of these marriages were in name only and solely for purposes of registration with the govern-



Three years after the Cultural Revolution, young people who once burned books now lined up to buy them.

ment. Others, of course, got married because they were convinced that the church was dead, that it would never rise again. There were others still who had tried to maintain good relationships with the government, like Bishops Guo Zeqian of Hangyang and Zong Huaimo of Shandong, who, along with many other intellectuals, became despondent and unable to bear with their humiliations, committed suicide.

Someone at the time remarked, "Religion no longer exists in China; it has been relegated to the museum of history." Many, however, even among those who had followed the government line remained staunchly loyal to the church. When they were released

after the Cultural Revolution, they threw themselves wholeheartedly into rebuilding the church.

There were others, of course, who had never followed the Party line. They had been imprisoned in the fifties and were still in prison. These managed to escape much of the madness of the Cultural Revolution. In fact prison was actually a haven of peace compared to what was going on outside. Many regarded their imprisonment and suffering as a precious gift. In his autobiography, *How Inscrutable His ways*, Bishop Deng Yiming of Guangzhou writes of his long years in prison, “Every day I prayed, meditated, and sang hymns so that I had no free time. These spiritual exercises supported me for the long years of prison life and gave me strength to overcome both the material and spiritual hardships and to have a serene heart...peace in the depth of my soul supported my spirit during the twenty-two long winters and summers of my prison life” (pp. 158-9).

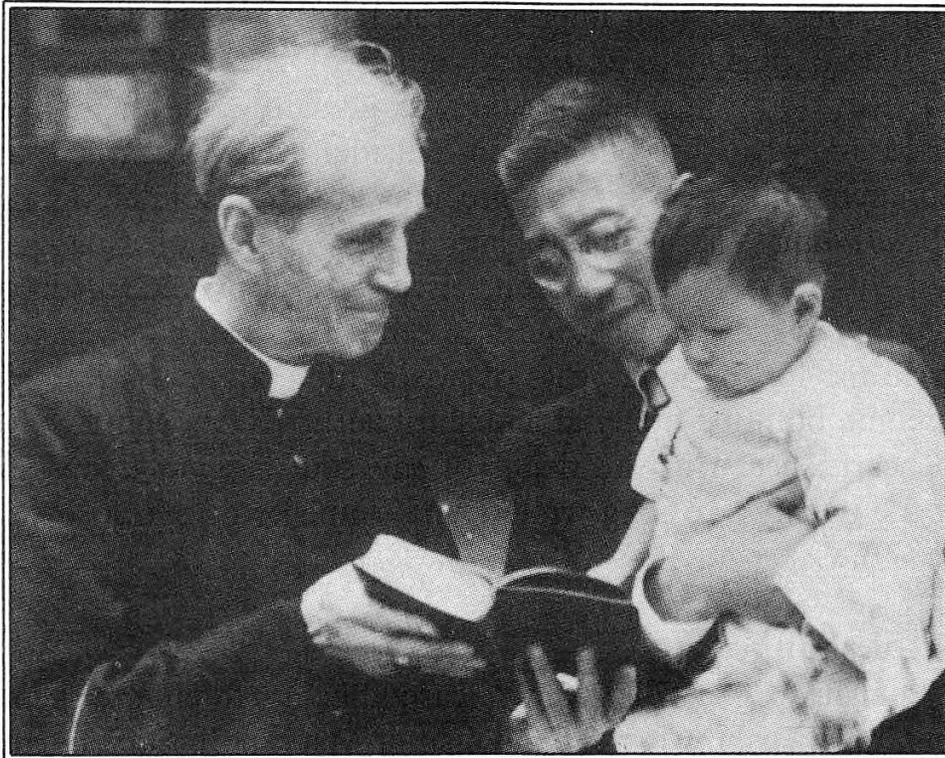
Winds of change

On July 10, 1970, China released the last foreign missionary held in China, Bishop James E. Walsh of Maryknoll. On November 20, 1971, the government reopened the South Church (Nantang) in Beijing to serve the foreign and diplomatic community. Although China was in the very middle of its Cultural Revolution, these two incidents gave reason to hope that things would eventually change for the better.

The barbaric behavior of the Red Guards, which had put the country in total chaos since 1966, began to subside in 1973 when the People’s Liberation Army was called upon to restore some semblance of civil and social order. The Army had to try to restabilize transportation, industry, finance, and trade. Eventually, they sent the young people, who had wrought such havoc, back home. Mao died in September 1976, and the Gang of Four were dismissed from the Party in July 1977. The Revolution had ended in 1976, but Huo Guofeng, who had replaced Mao as chairman of the Communist Party, formally declared the end of the Cultural Revolution at the 11th Party Congress in August 1977.

In 1978 Deng Xiaoping, who had been out of favor with the government returned to power. Many who had been falsely accused and condemned as “rightists”—these included many cadres and church officials—were released from prisons and reinstated. Even

church leaders who had been in prison since the fifties were released. The church was once again rising from the ashes of the Revolution and hoping for a second spring.



Bishop Walsh, the last foreign missionary held in China, was released on July 10, 1979.

The Red Guards today

As the day of celebration of the founding of the People's Republic approached, it seemed fitting to ask: Who were these Red Guards whose excesses are today so well documented and part of China's history? Where are they today?

The Red Guards represent 27 million Chinese born between 1949 and 1959. They are today in their forties and fifties and constitute roughly 10 per cent of China's urban population. They were the group of young idealists, mostly from the cities, who in their youth and in the midst of their education were sent to the countryside. There they endured untold hardships trying to survive in mountain areas or in remote villages. It would all be worth the struggle, they thought, since they would be making a significant contribution to the country by helping to transform the backward countryside. When they left, of course, their sufferings had made no difference. Nothing had changed. They were those young people

brainwashed to look on Mao as a god, to be loyal to the country under any and all circumstances and to hate “the class enemies of the people”. Their role models were those willing to sacrifice all for social reform. When they returned to the urban areas from their sojourn in the countryside, much had changed. Only when they had a bit of time to look back on their long nightmare did they begin to understand the harm they had inflicted on themselves and on the nation. They had lost ten years of their lives, and some were now too old to continue their education where they had left off. Those who were not too old were reluctant to return for help to the teachers they had so mercilessly beaten up. They were not ready or sufficiently educated to play a major part in Deng’s free market reforms. Some who retained their idealism were now convinced that China could never go back to Maoism. These pursued democratic ideals, and were in the vanguard of the April 5th movement that helped to remove the Gang of Four. They also took part in the Democracy Wall. Others are still wandering in a spiritual vacuum, trying to make sense out of life and looking for meaning. They have often been called the lost generation. But there is resilience in the human spirit and for those who have kept their idealism, certainly all is not lost.

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