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Shanghai's Bishop Jin, who worked to rebuild church, dies at 96

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Shanghai

Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian of Shanghai, a prominent and controversial figure in the Chinese Catholic church, died April 27 of pancreatic cancer. He was 96.

A 2007 article in *The Atlantic* monthly described him as "arguably the most influential and controversial figure in Chinese Catholicism of the last 50 years."

In the early 1980s, the bishop, who spent 18 years in a Chinese prison, made the decision to cooperate with the Chinese government, which strove to exercise control over the church through organs such as "patriotic associations," including one for Catholics.

Jesuit Fr. Michael Kelly, executive director of the Asian Catholic news agency UCA News, said of his fellow Jesuit: "From the 1980s, much to the suspicion of some, the condemnation of others but the amazement of most, Jin walked the thin line between recognizing the authority of the government while sticking to what he believed was most basic and important to Catholicism in China."

In a tribute on ucanews.com, Kelly said he once asked Jin how someone who had endured life in a communist prison could allow himself to function in the government-approved church.

He said the bishop responded: "'Michael, in the last millennium, there have been three attempts to introduce Christianity into China. All ended in the persecution of Christians and the expulsion of missionaries. Three times, the interventions had to begin with another wave of foreigners. I don't want there to have to be a fourth time.'"

"So, at 65 years of age in 1982, Louis Jin chose the road less traveled," Kelly wrote.

Jin spoke of his role in *The Atlantic* interview.

"The Vatican thinks that I don't work enough for the Vatican, and the government thinks that I work too much for the Vatican," he said. "It is not easy to satisfy both."

More than 1,000 people attended a funeral Mass for Jin April 29. A government-organized memorial service was scheduled for Thursday, after which his body will be cremated, reported UCA News.

Jin, who was born in 1916 in Shanghai, was ordained a Jesuit in 1945.

Two years later, he left for studies in France, Germany and Italy and earned a doctorate in theology. He returned to Shanghai and served for four years as rector of what was then known as the Xuhui Regional Seminary, later Sheshan Seminary.

He was arrested in 1955 because, he has said, he "opposed several laws of the state." During his time in prison,

he prayed and taught himself Russian.

After his release, Jin was sent to northern China for almost 10 years, where he spent some of his time working the land. During this time of house arrest he also worked on translations for the Chinese government. In a 1985 interview with Asia Focus, a publication of UCA News, he said the government asked him to translate the civil law of France, Germany and Austria as well as the criminal law of several European countries.

In the same interview, he said that when the Shanghai diocese asked him to return as seminary rector, "I prayed over it for a half year because of the conflict and contradictions, pro and contra, which I felt.

"For many years, I was against the (patriotic) association," he said. "Now I had to consider returning to work together with it. I was not very ready for this."

He returned to Shanghai in 1982 to serve as rector of the renamed Sheshan Seminary.

He told Asia Focus his "decision was correct."

"I don't regret coming back," he said. "Now I can educate seminarians as previously. I can publish books. ... It is important for Catholics. Now I am also in charge of church contact with foreign visitors. I can promote the mutual respect and confidence between the Chinese church and the church abroad. These things are contributions for the whole church."

In 1984, he re-established Guang Qi Research Center for academic research and publication. It has published Chinese-language Bibles, missals, theological and scholarly studies, hymnals and the universal catechism for Catholics throughout China.

Jin was elected auxiliary of Shanghai in December 1984 and was ordained the next month, without the approval of the Vatican. He became bishop of Shanghai in 1989 but did not reconcile his status with the Vatican until early in the 21st century, according to information on the diocesan website.

In 1989, he began diversifying the staff at Sheshan Seminary. He invited a Hong Kong Salesian -- now Hong Kong Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun -- and two American priests -- Jesuit Fr. Edward Malatesta and Maryknoll Fr. Lawrence Flynn -- to teach. Since then, the seminary has had teachers from all over the world.

Maryknoll Fr. Larry Lewis, who has worked with Chinese priests and nuns studying in the United States, recalled Malatesta relaying a conversation he had with Jin on a hot summer night on the roof of a building in the 1980s. Jin was telling Malatesta that he would like to send seminarians abroad to study so that he would have a well-educated faculty.

Lewis said Malatesta warned the bishop that he might lose 50 percent of his students to the lure of being abroad. Jin replied, "Yes, but I will gain 50 percent who will be well-educated."

One priest who taught at the seminary in the early 1990s was Fr. Savio Hon Tai-Fai, now an archbishop and secretary of the Vatican's Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

"I really appreciated his qualities as a man, his very openness, involved in educating the faithful, seminarians, nuns and priests. Every day after lunch, he spent always some time with his priests," Hon wrote in an article published by AsiaNews, the congregation's news agency, after Jin's death.

"Looking back at the history of the diocese in the last 60 years, which was a time of hardships for men and women religious as well as priests, we can say that Bishop Jin tried to do what was good for the church, but even his fellow Jesuits often misunderstood his intentions.

"Yet, he had the courage to ask for forgiveness and seek reconciliation with the Holy Father. In his pastoral letters to the diocese of Shanghai, he often stressed the importance of love, forgiveness and internal purification in the church."

In a statement issued Tuesday, the Vatican Secretariat of State said that, under Jin's guidance, the diocese of Shanghai "developed greatly. His pastoral commitment was impressive, modernizing the diocese in many ways and trying to keep it under the guidance of its pastors, including by relying on the esteem which the civil authorities had for him."

The statement said the bishop dedicated his life to "keeping alive love for Christ and the church while remaining loyal to his country and his culture."

Jin also became a figure at the national level. He persuaded the authorities to allow inclusion of prayer for the pope in the eucharistic prayers during Masses and helped to develop the liturgy in Chinese.

He was named an honorary president of the government-sanctioned Catholic Patriotic Association and the Chinese bishops' conference at the National Congress of Catholic Representatives, held in late 2010.

Though his health had deteriorated since Christmas, his name was among the nine Catholic representatives of the 12th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the top advisory body to the Beijing government.

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