



15th August 1973.

Fr. Aloysius
Yeh Shuen-Tin

Dear Confreres,

In Shanghai on 22nd May 1973 the Good God called to Himself the soul of our intrepid confrere, Fr. Aloysius Yeh Shuen-Tin.

Aged sixty and utterly spent after years upon years of dire suffering, witnessing for Christ among his fellow-Chinese, Fr. Aloysius has had his very life re-echo those grand words of St. Paul to Timothy: "I have fought the good fight to the end; I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith!" Please God, the crown of righteousness is his this many a day. Nevertheless, Confreres, let us be generous in our suffrages!

To anyone familiar with the history of the tea trade between China and Britain the city of Wenchow is of no little significance. On the South-eastern coast of China, some 160 miles South of Hangchow and 20 miles inland on the River Wu, it stands — survivor of sixteen centuries of urban life. Even to-day when it has been long outstripped as a transoceanic port by Shanghai and Canton, and by-passed moreover by China's interior rail network, it still counts in its latest census a population approaching a quarter of a million, living on its fishing industry, its farming, and its exports of tea, timber, citrus fruit, and tobacco.

About 34 miles north of this city within the diocese of Ningpo and precisely in the picturesque countryside of Yungkia, tiny Shuen-tin was born on 20th December 1912, grandson to an illustrious grandfather, Mr. Yeh Tse-yu. No one in the countryside but had the surname, Yeh, ("Leaf"); and fervent Buddhists were the grandfather and his family of five brothers and two sisters.

Mr. Yeh Tse-yu was a scholar of the Ch'ing Dynasty. Tall of stature, upright of character, generous of heart and open-minded, he sought for what was good and true. Of the public offices he held was that of Deputy to the Provincial Council. So earnestly

did he work for the extirpation of opium and gambling, he was awarded the Gold Medal with the title of "Defender of Public Welfare". When he and his whole family were received into the Church, he took the Christian name of Augustine, and from then on became committed to Catholic Action. In fact, he opened at his own expense a primary school in Yungkia where he employed keen teachers to teach catechism. This was the only Catholic school there, a most efficient one as far as results went. Exemplary in his own life, he delighted in helping out the missionary in every possible way. To the Mother of God he had a tender devotion, reciting her rosary at night and at leisure time. He even declaimed poems he composed in her honour.

To this sound healthy family of Yeh came Don Bosco as surely as he had gone to the Olive family in Marseilles decades earlier to select for himself Louis of holy memory here in China. From Mr. Yeh Tse-yu's grandchildren he selected no fewer than three boys, Bro. Peter Yeh Ming Zen destined for death in a Communist gaol as a Salesian cleric on 19th May 1952, Bro. Peter Yeh Jih-chiu happily with us in Macau, and Fr. Aloysius Yeh Shuen-tin who was to survive seven years in different gaols and ten years in labour-camps. In these grandchildren China has richly vindicated the great surmise our good father, Don Bosco, had of her in his visions.

Yeh Shuen-tin was just a week past his 13th birthday when his whole family were baptised. Within the following five years came Don Bosco's call. For it was in 1930 that old Mr. Yeh Tse-yu had to champion Shuen-tin's right to follow out his priestly vocation and get him off to Hong Kong via Shanghai and the good bands of our Fr. Ernest Fontana. The family difficulty was that by local custom Aloysius at 16 was promised in marriage to some neighbour's daughter; and that neighbour was reluctant to lose so promising a son-in-law. Aloysius' mother would not give up so easily then or later, however.

The 18-year-old student who arrived in Shaukiwan, Hong Kong, in 1931 for his three years' aspirantate was a laudable reflection of his good grandfather. Tall, spruce, and lithe of figure, he had the high forehead of a scholar and the measured controlled movements of the virtuous Chinese man in the Confucian code. His disposition was gentle and calm. His attitude, kindly and attentive. His character, as straight as a ram-rod ... and as firm. His company was welcome to everyone in the Community.

His years of aspirantate and that of novitiate passed without incident at Shaukiwan. The life seemed made for him. Then followed his 2½ years' studies in philosophy, where life was rough and uncouth. The traditional games of Valdocco had to be played during recreation, with the cisalpine brand of fair play and honest dealing. The occasional show of high indignation on Bro. Aloysius' features was as bracing as a fresh breeze from the Atlantic.

1937-1940 was his period of tyrocinium. The right man in the right place, he was appointed Assistant to the Chinese aspirants then housed in a part of the vocational school in Aberdeen, Hong Kong. The priest-in-charge, Bro. Aloysius' immediate superior, was Fr. Michael Arduino. Bro. Aloysius proved himself so invaluable an aid that later—years later—Mgr. Arduino would call for Fr. Aloysius in Shiu Chow when the going was

rough, and a Chinese Bishop—or at least a Chinese Vicar General—might have saved the situation. But the sands had run out.

In 1940 the Salesian superiors were escorted out of Hong Kong as undesirable aliens. So to Shanghai went the Aspirantate, Novitiate, and Theologate. Bro. Aloysius went with his companions to Kuo Foo Road, Nantao, Shanghai, where he settled down to studies in theology for four years. They were lean years, hungry years; and his good mother was again calling for his return home. The trouble had hardened: his brother having died some years previously in Paris, Aloysius was now the only hope for perpetuating the family. The fat calf, so to speak, was killed and everything was ready—but in a worldly sense. His refusal to his good mother must have cost Bro. Aloysius untold pain. But refuse he did. True to his total committal to Don Bosco, Bro. Aloysius persevered in his studies despite the rude hardship of those years; and on 29th January 1945 he was ordained priest by Mgr. Haouisée S.J., the great Bishop of Shanghai and staunch friend to Don Bosco and his Salesians.

In priesthood Fr. Aloysius spent some years in the new centre of ours in Suchow Foo to the North-west of Nanking. Conditions there were at the best on par with Don Bosco's Pinardi shed. Later he was stationed in our very primitive place in Chapei where he endeavoured to develop the little there was doing there.

In 1949 the Communists made their takeover. This made eventual persecution of the Church inevitable. The Reds followed orders. The stereotyped pattern began to unfold. Lying propaganda, insulting tags, catchy slogans, were heard on every hand. The usual attempts were made to spread confusion among the clergy, and to break the allegiance of the laity. Fr. Aloysius loved his country dearly. He was pained to see it so abused. His fine sense of discernment and his tempered sense of discipline assured his firm stand on issues.

In 1951 Mgr. Arduino requested that Fr. Aloysius be sent to him in our diocese of Shiuchow. All foreign missionaries were being expelled. Fr. Aloysius should be appointed Vicar General.

Fr. Aloysius arrived in Shiuchow, but was promptly clapped into gaol. He had, said the Court, not observed the Regulations of Travel. He stayed in prison for five months: from April to September. When released, he had to get out of that region and betake himself back to Shanghai.

Back in Shanghai, he was made Parish Priest of Chapei by Bishop Kiong, first Chinese Bishop of Shanghai. In his humble way, Fr. Aloysius seemed reluctant to take up the charge: "I am afraid I might go weak!" he said, "In gaol I feared the same!"

The communists lost little time in opening their campaign against Mgr. Kiong. But the Bishop stood up to all the persecution like a rock upon rock. He was packed off to gaol finally, and has not been heard of since. With his Bishop Fr. Aloysius suffered and prayed. In September 1955 he was put into prison.

Later in 1957 there was opened a six-week course of Political Indoctrination for Priests. This entailed six hours of class every day. The aim was to win over to the "Patriotic Church" those elements still remaining faithful to the Pope. Fr. Aloysius, of course, had to attend. He knew the line: keeping cool, never arguing, never voicing an objection. Then came the closing lecture, and the inevitable interrogation of the priests, one by one. When it came to Fr. Aloysius' turn, he was asked what now was his attitude. His answer sounded gentle, but firm: "As before!" Back to gaol he went.

The following year another course was opened. This was for priests, nuns, and laymen. It was a three-month session with three daily meetings of two hours each. Fr. Aloysius took the same stand.

Release from gaol came some years later. Indeed, in 1965 he felt so free as to ask Fr. Provincial if he had any outstanding task for him to do. Fr. Acquistapace sent some copies of the Biographical Memoirs of Don Bosco with the idea to have an adapted translation done. Nothing to wonder at that nothing more was heard of the copies or of the translation. What complications and interrogations this sort of mail caused him we actually do not know. We are told that "it was known he continued to enjoy a limited freedom."

"A limited freedom" sums up his years with a grimness. We know that he had been set for years on such heavy work as earth-labourer and the lighter sort as umbrella-maker. He was still at work during the month of May last. On the 15th he collapsed. Diagnosis at the hospital has it noted down as Paralysis of the left hand and leg: a stark recall of the enduring hardship he had put up with for too long.

It took him a week to die. Then the Government took over again: their last task. Bro. Peter they had buried in the prisoners' plot: Fr. Aloysius they cremated in the municipal crematorium.

God grant that we all take inspiration from this magnificent model of full-bodied full-hearted committal to religious life and to Salesian priesthood! "O bone Jesu," Fr. Aloysius had penned as his Ordination memento, "fac ut evadam sacerdos secundum Cor Tuum!"

Thanks be to the Sacred Heart that this noble scion of the good Yeh family held so faithfully to the high tenor of life he had proposed for himself almost 30 years before, and that in our time and within the confines of his own China, that great land he loved so well and so truly.

May God glorify him for his love and his loyalty!

Yours in Don Bosco,
Fr. Alexander Ma, SDB.
(Provincial)

Salesian Provincial Office,
69-B, Pokfulam Road,
Hong Kong.