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Bishop O'Shea Comes Home

By MARY LOUISE CALLAHAN

FROM the very beginning the doctors in the Jacksonville hospital had little hope for the emaciated-looking Bishop with the "Mindzenty Look." His chart read "bilateral far advanced pulmonary tuberculosis."

It was early in February, 1953, when His Excellency, Most Rev. John A. O'Shea, C.M., Bishop of Kanchow, China, reached St. Vincent's Hospital after months of imprisonment, torture, poor food and endless grilling as a prisoner of the Chinese Reds. They had decided at last to lift the Bamboo Curtain and return their victim to America. Bishop Ford had died under their hands the year before. A second dead American would make them "lose face."

Although seriously ill, the Bishop had measured up admirably to the terrific demands made upon his strength en route home. Receptions were held for him in Manila, Guam, Honolulu and San Francisco. He was even questioned by the FBI. His cross-country trip brought him east to the hospital—but half dead!

The Sisters of Charity at the hospital were frightened by his condition, especially when Dr. Philip Horn examined the Bishop and found him in the last stages of tuberculosis. After repeated examinations and X rays, the physician said, "I have nothing to work on." Surgery was advised for removal of the diseased lung.

With all hope of a cure by medical aid destroyed, the Sisters, knowing of the Bishop's lifelong devotion to Mother Seton, began a novena, begging God, through her intercession, to restore their precious patient to health.

At the end of the novena, an X ray showed, to the doctor's amazement, that a remarkable change had taken place. His joy

made him herald the improvement as a great favor of Mother Seton. From that time on, each X ray showed greater improvement.

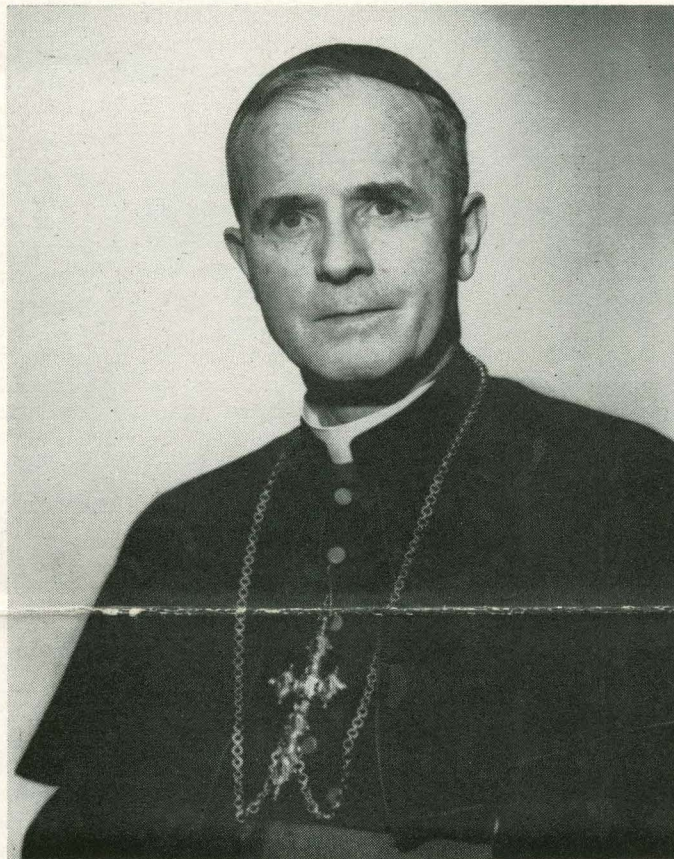
The first X ray taken at the hospital was on February 7. Comparison with films taken in Hong Kong in September, November and December, 1952, disclosed very little if any change over that period of time. The second X ray taken on March 4, 1953, showed some improvement as compared with the first film. At that time Dr. Horn remarked that the X ray revealed "marked improvement." The last X ray was taken on March 18. The report did not state a complete cure but over this period of time there was greater improvement in each X ray taken. When His Excellency landed in America he was practically a skeleton, weighing only ninety-eight pounds. Today he tips the scales at one hundred sixty-five pounds.

Bishop O'Shea, who is now at Mary Immaculate Seminary, Northampton, Pa., attributes his recovery to Mother Seton's intercession. Day by day he is regaining strength and is almost back to his pristine, vigorous health. He is most grateful to the beloved Foundress for her prayers at the Great White Throne and to her Daughters on earth for their sacrifices and prayers for his recovery. Since the beginning of the Cause, Bishop O'Shea has recited daily the prayers for

Mother Seton's glorification (not only once but often) and his confidence in her is inspiring.

* * *

To begin at the beginning of Bishop O'Shea's career, one must go back to 1921 when the young Vincentian set out for China, romantic land of temple bells, paddles chunking in the



His Excellency
The Most Reverend John A. O'Shea, C.M.
Bishop of Kanchow, China

Mother Seton Guild

Emmitsburg, Md.



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Mother Seton*

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The Guild is, moreover, an organization established in 1939, with the approval of the Holy See, to promote the Canonization of Mother Seton in every way possible, by means of literature, religious articles, etc.

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rivers, flying fishes and mist-grey rice fields. He was young then with the brave heart of a missionary beating in his breast.

In 1928 he was made Bishop of Kanchow, which Vicariate he filled for about 25 years. He was devoted to his flock and they to him. Around 1931 the Reds overran China, destroying missions and persecuting bishops, priests and religious. In Kanchow they dropped three bombs. Bishop O'Shea was urged to flee for safety but he refused to leave his post which was under the protection of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. He was arrested and his mission searched. Later, in honor of his courage and fearless devotion to his flock, the Bishop received a personal letter of commendation from His Holiness, Pope Pius XII. This precious document was later taken by the Reds together with his other possessions.

Our Blessed Mother gave visible evidence of her love and protection for the Kanchow Mission on one memorable occasion. A woman who was a rabid Communist tried to prevent the children of the orphanage from going to the mission to attend Mass one morning. The fanatic, running through an alley to catch up with the children, was suddenly halted by a Lady in White. It was then that the Bishop knew Our Lady would never forsake the mission.

BISHOP IS SEIZED

And so the years passed. It was February 17, 1952, feast of the French Vincentian martyr, Blessed Francis Clet, who had been strangled to death on a cross in China 132 years ago, that an unprecedented cold wave, with rain and sleet, ushered in what was to be an eventful Sunday in Kanchow.

Bishop O'Shea was saying early Mass for the Catholics of the city. The stillness of the Sabbath lay on everything. Suddenly the whole mission compound was swarming with Communist soldiers and police. Guards with rifles and fixed bayonets guarded the church doors. Soldiers ran about in the garden outside the church and gave curt orders.

"It was the first time anybody ever laid rough hands on me during Mass," said the Bishop afterwards when he recalled the dark hours of that winter morning. The people in the congregation were puzzled and asked one another in whispers, "What's it all about?" The Communists had already seized the hospital, the orphanage and the school. Daily the police had visited the people in their homes trying to persuade them to turn against their bishop, priests and sisters. Now they prayed and were fright-

ened in turn. They wondered if this were simply another petty annoyance of the Reds or was something much worse about to take place.

Bishop O'Shea, who was assisted at Mass by the seminarians and their director, Rev. Francis Moehringer, C.M., had just reached the "Secret" when the Oriental syllables, "Ho Jo-wan," boomed through the house chapel. This is Chinese for the Bishop's name.

"A moment later a rough hand gripped my shoulder," described His Excellency. "Looking around, I saw a khaki-clad figure who motioned me to accompany him."

"I cannot leave now," he said. "Please let me finish Mass. I won't be longer than fifteen minutes."

The guards agreed but warned the Bishop to hurry. As soon as he had finished Mass and laid aside his vestments, he was ordered out of the chapel to the porch. There, exposed to rain and sleet, he joined Rev. Joseph Wang, the pastor; Rev. Gene Cheng, the hospital chaplain; Paul Li, the school principal; Joseph Sie and Sarah Sung, mission catechists. The Reds lined them up for a picture.

Bishop O'Shea was marched to another quarter of the compound where a printed form of the indictment was placed in his hand. "It proclaimed to all the world," he said, "that I was the organizer of a subversive force, the Legion of Mary; that this organization was in league with the American imperialists; that the aforesaid Ho Jo-wan was a spy of the American government and was plotting the overthrow of the People's regime."

The guards ordered him to lead the way to his room which they ransacked from top to bottom. The loot from the Bishop's room, which included such "subversive" material as a couple of ancient Montgomery Ward catalogues, his breviary and a ritual, was piled on a prie-dieu in the yard. The Bishop and the five others were made to pose behind this "evidence" for official pictures to "record for posterity the dastardly machinations of the Legion of Mary in Kanchow."

Several hours had passed by this time. At last the signal was given to march. Off they went, through the chilling rain and sleet which was heavy by now, through the main gate of the mission, flanked on either side by a platoon of soldiers. At the jail they were placed in separate cells. The Bishop recalls that "the jailer and his assistant, with a push and a kick, sent me sailing through the door, and slammed it after me." He didn't see his companions for two weeks.

Alone, the Bishop found himself in a very small cell, about five feet by eight. The inside walls, two of them, were of brick, but the other two were of logs, with three-inch chinks between them. Open to the weather the logs let in biting cold. It was below freezing and the Bishop, not very strong, shivered. In one corner of the cell he saw what dimly resembled a bed, several boards resting on two sawhorses. There was nothing else in the room.

Soon the jailer and his assistant returned. They ordered their prisoner to strip and examined each article of his clothing minutely. They even turned out the pockets and piled the contents on the bed. He was allowed to wear a thin shirt and trunks, scant attire for February in Kanchow, the coldest time of year in that part of China. They took away the laces in his shoes and belt.

REDS OVERLOOK MEDAL

But a strange thing happened. Rough hands had removed the watch from his pocket but they had overlooked a small Miraculous Medal in the same place which the Bishop had not really tried to hide. The jailers were evidently not as thorough as they pretended to be, thought the Bishop. Or was this another timely intervention of the Lady in White who had protected his orphans in Kanchow twenty years before? The Bishop must have known the answer, for his heart beat with joy at the discovery and his spirits were almost light, for he knew Our Blessed Lady was with him in jail and would help him.

The inventory completed, the jailers left, taking all the clothing with them. "Every once in awhile," said the Bishop, "the guard would apply his eye to the peephole in the door to see that I was still there, though how one could get out of that cell would puzzle Houdini."

In an attempt to keep warm, the shivering prisoner tried to pace up and down the narrow cell. A hoarse growl

sent him back to bed. He soon learned from the guards that he was not supposed to walk at all in a Communist cell but must sit doubled up on the bed all day long from early morning until nine in the evening. He was constantly watched by the Reds who sought to break his morale and weaken his mind. They wanted to get a "confession" from him.

The first evening the endless, stupid, abusive grilling began. About seven o'clock the Bishop was called from his cell and, flanked by two soldiers with tommy guns, led into another room. Here he found two men, evidently agents of the Politburo, ready to question him. They commanded him to tell the story of his life . . . his family history . . . their financial status . . . how much money he had in the bank.

At other times he was questioned about the Legion of Mary and his relationship with the Internuncio of the Holy See to China, Archbishop Riberi. At another inquisition he was asked to admit he was a spy for the United States. The Bishop would not.

"You're a spy of the imperialistic American Government," accused the quiz master. "I am an American citizen but not

a spy," answered the Bishop.

They thought the American prelate had a cache of deadly weapons hidden away somewhere. They would love to have it. But the Bishop had no weapons, no revolvers.

And thus it went from day to day, the Bishop always tired, tortured and distressed, but never giving in to the crafty, abusive inquisitors.

Food did not appear until the second day. By now the prisoner had a severe cold brought on by insufficient clothing and the dampness of the cell. Five or six days passed before he could even look at food. During the inquisitions that first week he often hurried to a corner of the room to relieve his distressed stomach. The prison fare consisted chiefly of water, rice and ersatz soup.

BECOMES POLITICAL PRISONER

After several weeks Bishop O'Shea was moved to the Lubianka of Kanchow, the jail for political prisoners. He was placed in a solitary cell, small, dark and reeking with moisture. Every time it rained the cell was flooded and the bedding soaked. He had to sit upright in his bunk all day long. If he moved from his allotted place a torrent of abuse from the guards brought him back to his hunched-up position. Guards with machine guns patrolled the corridor day and night.

In describing his cell, the Bishop says that "it was strategically placed for maximum discomfort. It was across the corridor from the latrine, an open pit with a noxious stench that hung about that part of the prison day and night." Nature's needs were forced to rigorous schedules. Two minutes were allowed for elimination and momentary recesses were permitted at noon and evening. The prisoners were forced to restrain themselves.

There were a few Christians on the prison work gang. The storeroom and the door of the Bishop's cell were on the opposite legs of a right angle so that he could look

from one room into another. One day a corps of porters came to get rice for the kitchen. One hung back until he was the last to leave the storeroom. He shielded himself from observation, waved at Bishop O'Shea and made a big Sign of the Cross.

"I gave him my blessing," said the prelate, "and he scurried off with a broad smile on his face. Every day he went through the same maneuver." It was a little thing, to bless the porter every day, but it gave courage to him and to the Bishop.

BISHOP HAS PNEUMONIA

The prisoner was becoming terribly thin by now and his beard had become long and matted. The guards nagged him "to confess" unheard of crimes. The floor of the cell became a quagmire when it rained, causing the leather of his shoes to rot away. Bedbugs became friendly and rats roamed the cell at random.

But he was not really unhappy. One gets to know a lot about God alone in a prison cell. The Bishop was deprived of friends and worldly comforts but God Himself came to encourage him in the lonely jail in Kanchow.

By now it was May and the continual dampness, the poor



Bishop O'Shea boards train for Hong Kong after seven months' confinement in Communist cell as political prisoner of Reds.

food and thin clothing had done its work. Bishop O'Shea had pneumonia. They gave him no medical care. His mouth was full of sores and he was wasting away with a high fever. The jailer, through fear that he might die in the prison, ordered the Bishop returned to the mission in a rickshaw. The children in the streets stared at the "foreign devil" in the conveyance with his head rolling from side to side on his chest, his hollow brown eyes peering from a gruesome beard of four months' standing. The priests of the mission met him at the main gate, carried him to his room and propped him in a chair, for he couldn't breathe lying down. They gave him the last sacraments.

Hardly more than two hours had passed when the commissar commanded the Bishop to be removed to the public hospital because he was a prisoner. Dropping him at the mission had been a mistake. Father Jules Meyrat, a Swiss Vincentian of the mission, begged to send the dying Bishop to the Sisters' hospital where he would receive good care. The request was refused. The patient was taken to the People's Hospital. He remained there five weeks during the blistering summer heat. He was given penicillin and made some improvement, although his leg remained sore.

One morning the assistant jailer appeared in the Bishop's room and commanded him to get up and return to the jail. The patient asked for a rickshaw, for he was too weak to walk. His request was refused and, supported by two trusties, slowly and with pain, he walked the half mile to the cell he had left several weeks before.

July was ushered in with the intense heat of summer which often reaches 110 degrees in Kanchow. The sun beat down on the low tile roof of the jail close to the sick man's head. Already on fire with fever this new torture added to his misery. He was parched with thirst most of the time, for the prisoners were allotted only two cups of water a day.

Bishop O'Shea had been imprisoned for seven months without a trial. In all this time the Reds had found no one who would accuse him of anything. One night the trusty who occupied the cell with him whispered that the prelate would be sent home soon.

"I have just listened in on a meeting which the jailers and three of the security police were holding in the jailer's office," he said. "And they were talking about sending you back to America to die."

On the evening of September 15 a young Communist agent came to the cell with the jailer. "Be ready to go to the bus station at five o'clock tomorrow morning," he ordered. "We're sending you home."

They wanted him to walk to the bus station two and a half miles from the jail, but, discovering their prisoner was too weak and that one leg was paralyzed, they carried him in a rickshaw. His clothing consisted of a pair of ragged trousers, a shirt and

half-rotted laceless shoes. The day was hot and the Bishop suffered with a high fever. He looked like a peasant as he hadn't shaved for seven months and his beard was long, white and matted.

At the bus station he was overjoyed to find Father Meyrat and Sister Vincent waiting for him. The Bamboo Curtain was lifting for them, too. The Swiss priest had been with the Bishop for three decades. Sister was the last of the American Sisters of Charity who had operated two hospitals until the Communists confiscated them. She had been under house arrest since March.

The three were seated in different parts of the bus so they could not communicate with one another. The Bishop was placed over the charcoal burner, the fumes of which almost stifled him. It was a very hot day and for fourteen hours they chugged along in the bus, always under guard. The prisoner, who weighed only ninety-eight pounds, was deathly pale.

At Kukong they boarded the train for Canton where their possessions were examined by officials. That night they stayed at a hostel in the city close to the station. Early the next morning they entrained for Hong Kong. At Kowloon they disembarked and were questioned for three hours by the Reds. Again their papers were examined, their possessions searched and their passports checked. At last the barbed wire was lifted and they were thrust through to freedom. They walked about a quarter of a mile to board the train for Hong Kong where they arrived September 18.

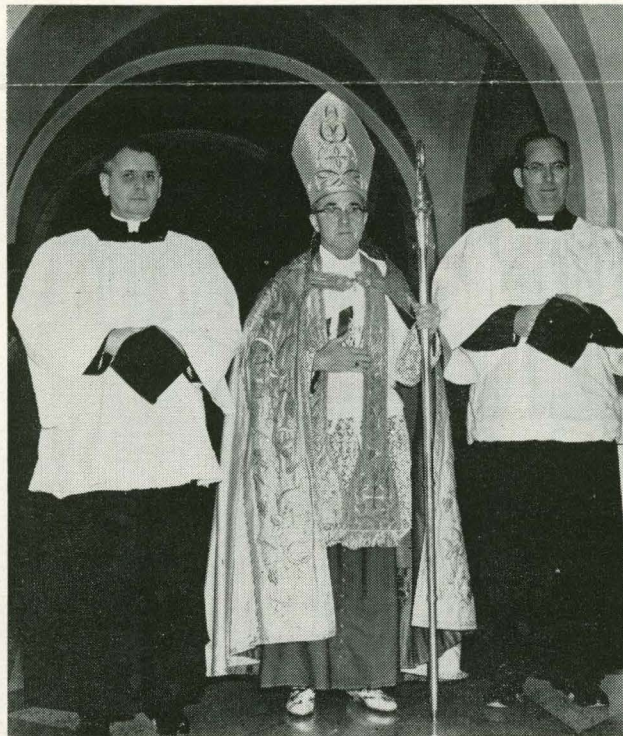
In Hong Kong Bishop O'Shea was taken immediately to St. Paul's Hospital. He was all but dead. He was suffering from pneumonia, complete dehydration, deficiency in vitamins and his mouth was filled with sores. He was fed intravenously. The patient's fever was reduced by degrees but X-ray examinations revealed he was in the advanced stages of tuberculosis.

After four months' treatment he showed some improvement. The doctors thought he was strong enough to make the trip to America. And so it was that Bishop O'Shea, with Father Meyrat and Sister Vincent, sailed for America January 19, 1953. The Bishop was coming home!

* * *

Bishop O'Shea, who continues to improve, officiated at the dedication of Mary Immaculate Seminary, Northampton, Pa., last December 8, and celebrated the Solemn Pontifical Mass following the dedication ceremonies.

Always devoted to Mother Seton, he learned as she did, to unite his will to God's in time of great suffering. Seemingly forsaken by friends, physically in pain, cold and hungry, yet the Bishop was not unhappy. He was alone—but alone with God in Whom he found inexpressible joy during his darkest hours.



His health greatly improved, Bishop O'Shea officiates at dedication of Mary Immaculate Seminary, Northampton, Pa., December 8, 1954. On his right is Rev. John McGowan, C.M., and at the left is Rev. John Young, C.M.