

As I Saw Red China

This is the third of five N.C.W.C. Feature articles by Father Joseph P. McCormack, M.M., who was released this June after five years imprisonment in a Communist China jail. Father McCormack celebrated his first anniversary four years ago in St. Dominic's Church, St. Louisville, his brother Edward McCormack lives in Palmyra.

By FR. JOSEPH P. McCORMACK, M.M.

Confusion is the secret weapon of communism. That's what they are doing to the whole world today.

Confusion is the system employed by the biggest communist diplomats and officials.

And you can't compromise with communists. Five years in a Red prison has taught me that, if nothing else. The Reds are only satisfied with total surrender.

This is a lesson the free world has yet to learn.

DURING THE LONG

and weary months of interrogation, the Reds tried to get into my mind by promising me freedom and an easier life. They put me under great pressure to accuse various consuls, Church officials and others of acts against the government.

It didn't matter that they were absolutely ridiculous charges. Sometimes the words I was to say were put into my mouth. But I knew I could not yield. I knew that if I gave them but one name, they would demand more.

The names of any friends would mean their instant arrest, and the names of others extracted from them would in turn be arrested. Thus a single compromise would mean the arrest of many people.

I was introduced to a communist court—where "justice" is administered—shortly after my arrest.

At my first trial there were about 12 people present. Among them were at least two women—one an interpreter—a couple of male secretaries, political workers, a couple of judges and of course, the ever-present, ever-near, machine gun guard.

My first impulse on seeing such a pompous group was to smile and say, "And the top of the mornin' to you!", but I didn't know if the interpreter could translate that into dialect, so I skipped it and sat down in a low slung chair that was obviously meant for me.

I leaned casually forward in the chair and the head judge snapped at me: "Sit still!" I straightened. In a minute or so another shout from the man behind the gun. I knew then they meant business.

It was easy to see that they were eager to start questioning me. First questions were about my friends. Who were they? Then came threats if I did not tell them everything about myself and others. Then promises of release and rewards if I talked up and answered their questions.

I was told to begin my statements.

I BEGAN by explaining that I

thought they had made a mistake. I had done no wrong. I was a very unimportant person. Just a simple priest in Shanghai who knew no one of importance and wielded no influence.

This annoyed them and they called me and ordered me back to my cell and told me I would be called out again the following day and that I should come prepared with answers.

At my second interrogation, I realized the real charges against me and against all priests—their charge: religion and belief in God. The communists are more afraid of the Catholic Church at the present time than any other institution on earth.

Even the Chinese communists, who only number some five million out of a population of 600 million, are afraid of the Church and of God, of course, because the Oriental in his heart believes in the supernatural and the spiritual life.

Every interrogation for the first year and a half dealt with matters concerning the Catholic Church. They wanted the names of every priest and Sister in my mission area.

They accused me of stirring up trouble when I sent the priests and Sisters out of Fushun in 1948. They used an article I had written for the Maryknoll magazine in 1948 about the flight of my seminarians from Fushun to Peking as proof of my intentions that I intended to send these young men, once ordained, back to China as spies.

During the first eight months of my imprisonment I had 72 separate interrogations according to the actual count of the judge. The questioning usually lasted about two and a half hours.

The interrogations did not let up after the first eight months but rather became more intense demanding long written statements to Red questions.

ABOUT THIS TIME I began to feel physically and mentally exhausted. The strain began to take its toll on an old man in his sixties. But the communists were careful not to exceed the

limits of physical endurance. They wanted no martyrs.

Every two weeks thereafter they sent a doctor to examine my heart, blood pressure, and soon, each month, I was given an injection.

The next step was an attempt to indoctrinate me with communist propaganda.

They call it "doctrine" and use the same term in Chinese as we Catholics use to express the teachings of the Church.

At one period I was made to listen to this propaganda for 12 hours a day, mixed with reminders of my personal danger and threats.

As an example of how low the communists stoop, take the fake trial they staged for me on Christmas Eve, 1954. They called me up from my cell and told me it was Christmas Eve and that if I answered the questions they asked I would be out in time to celebrate Christmas Mass.

"Now this is the most important day of your life," they said. "If you tell us what we want to know, you'll be released immediately. Now tell us!"

Of course I had nothing to tell them and said so. And they said I didn't have the right "mental attitude" and should return to my cell until I could assume the right attitude.

I paused outside the door on the way to the cell and heard them laughing heartily, satisfied that they had thoroughly confused me and made me homeless on Christmas Eve. Imagine, trying to make a man with 30 years in China homesick.

Two years and eight months later, after hundreds of trials and thousands of questions I was finally given an open trial and sentenced to five years in prison. I was charged with collecting political and economic information for the American government. But the real charges were simply for performing my priestly duties, protecting the seminarians and for knowing "too many people."

For these "crimes" according to communist "justice" I merited five years of mental and physical torture from interrogations. I lived on garbage for food, and was subjected to degradation below the standard of human dignity.

NEXT WEEK — In Jail.



Catholic Chapel At World Fair

Brussels — (RNS) — Visitors gather at the 200-seat modernistic chapel of the Vatican City Pavilion at the World's Fair here. The pavilion is known as Civitas Dei, the City of God. It also includes a 2,500-seat church, three separate exhibition buildings, a restaurant, a film theater and an auditorium. Many Catholic events and ceremonies are taking place at the pavilion during the fair.

Christopher Dawson Gets Visa OK

Washington — (NC) — British Catholic historian Christopher Dawson has been found admissible to this country by U.S. Public Health authorities and will be granted an entry visa, the State Department announced.

The 68-year-old scholar, a convert to Catholicism, will arrive in New York with his wife on September 30 aboard the S.S. Coronia. Dean Douglas Horton of the Harvard University divinity school told the N.C.W.C. News Service.

MR. DAWSON, who has never before visited North America, will come to the first professor of Roman Catholic studies in the history of Harvard's Protestant-oriented divinity school. Dean Horton said the historian will take up his duties at Harvard "right away" and added: "He'll leap from the deck to a classroom."

The State Department's announcement that Mr. Dawson will come to this country elated an uphil fight by the historian and his friends in this country to convince U.S. officials that his health is good enough for him to enter the United States.

Early in July the State Department denied him an entry visa, because chest X-rays seemed to indicate that he had pulmonary tuberculosis.

The State Department's action

forced M. Dawson to cancel a series of lectures and seminars which he intended to conduct during the summer sessions of Gonzaga University, Spokane, Wash.

However, despite the adverse decision of Public Health authorities, Mr. Dawson immediately denied that he had ever had tuberculosis. He repeatedly asserted that his British doctors said he did not have the disease.

Mr. Dawson's Harvard appointment came last April, when he was named first Charles Chauncy Stillman professor in the university's divinity school. Harvard spokesmen said that, according

to available records, he is the first Catholic to be appointed to the divinity school faculty. Persons invited to teach at Harvard are chosen by faculty vote.

At that time President Nathan M. Pusey of Harvard declared that "the Stillman guest professorship . . . will illuminate for future ministers of the Protestant denominations the history, theology and dogma of the Roman Catholic Church, and its implications for the modern mind." It was also announced that Stillman guest professors are normally expected to remain at Harvard for three to five years.

Pope Thanks Americans For Aid To World Needy

Castelgandolfo — (RNS) — Roman Catholics in the United States were praised here by Pope Pius XII for their assistance to needy people throughout the world.

THE PONTIFF expressed his appreciation for the American aid at an audience given to leaders of Catholic Welfare Conference at his summer residence.

Heading the group was Msgr. Edward E. Swanson of Brooklyn, executive director of CRS, who was in Europe for a series of international relief conferences.

Msgr. Swanson described to the Pope the aid given by Americans for the world-wide services of the Catholic relief agency.

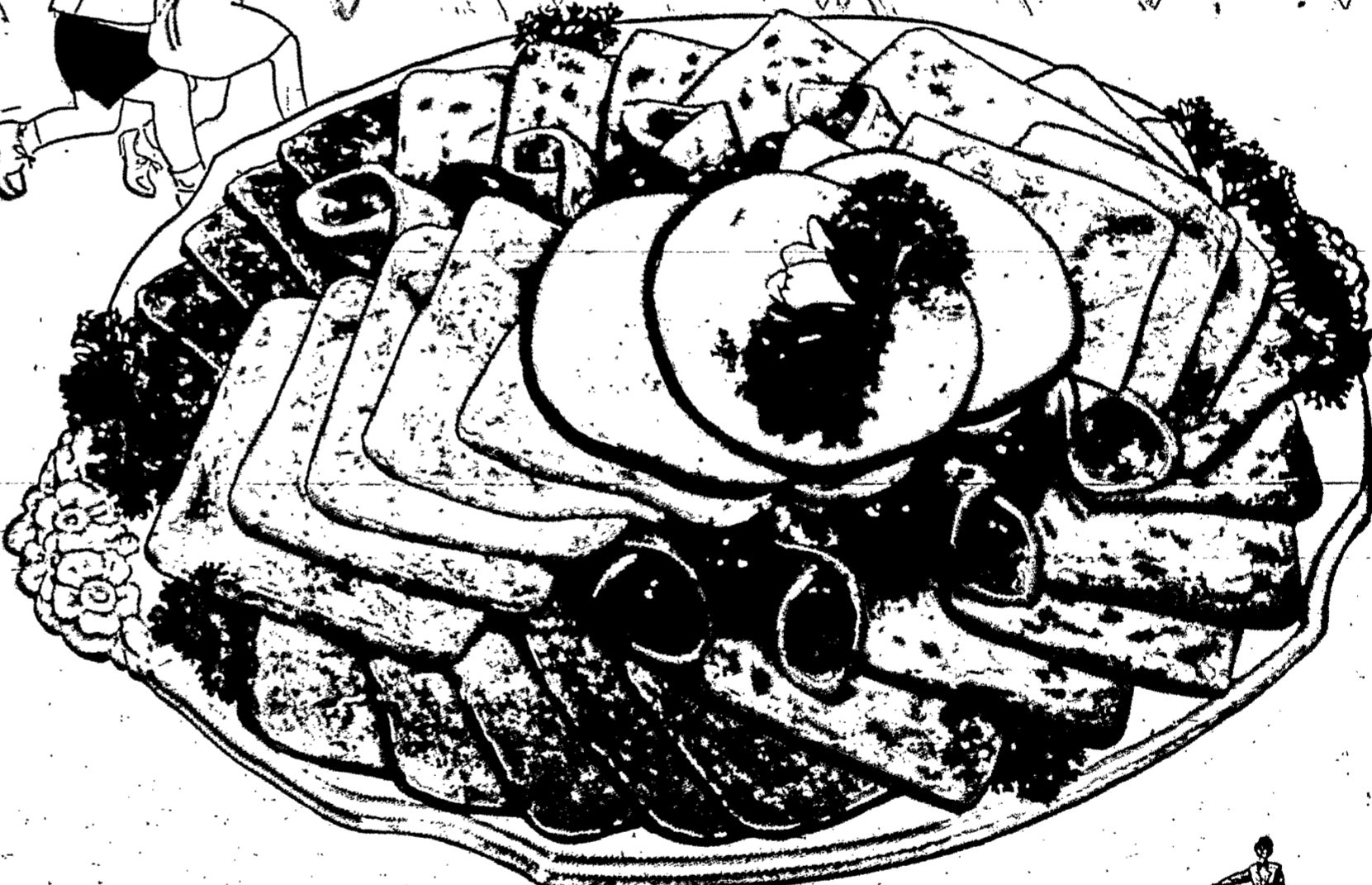
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