

A PROFESSION OF FAITH

JOHN TONG CHE-TCHE

[The profession of faith related here has perhaps already been paid for with the life of its author, a Chinese priest, John Tong Che-tche. It was made at Chunting on the 3rd of June, 1951, before representatives of the Government and of the Church, Christians and non-Christians, at the time of the demonstrations organised to prepare for the expulsion of the Papal Internuncio, Mgr Riberi.

Father Tong was arrested on the 2nd of July, 1951, and nothing has been heard of him since.]

IN the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us.

Mary, conceived without sin, Mediatrix of all Grace, pray for us.

Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, pray for us.

(He bowed to the portrait of President Mao, and then to the audience.)

High authorities of the Government, high dignitaries of the Church, faithful Christians, gentlemen:

The subject of this discourse will be: the sacrifice I am making of myself to the two supreme powers.

People who do not believe in the existence of God, nor in the soul, who do not recognise the Pope as the representative of Jesus Christ, nor the Catholic hierarchy, say that the movement for triple autonomy¹ is a purely patriotic movement. They recognise the liberty of the Catholic faith, they agree that there can be relations of a purely religious nature between the faithful and the Pope. But this movement, developing outside the hierarchy,

¹ Triple autonomy 'in administration, finance and doctrine', claimed for the new Chinese Church, is the programme of a movement of 'reform' inspired and encouraged by the Communist authorities. Supposed to have been begun by a group of Christians in northern Szechwan in December 1950, it has published its declaration in all the newspapers in the country (February). It claims to be open alike to Catholics and Protestants. Under the pretext of cleansing the Church from imperialism, it is in fact an attempt at a schismatic Church subject to the secular power.

today calls upon us to attack the Pope's representative, Mgr Riberi. Tomorrow, perhaps, it will require us to attack the Pope, the representative of Jesus Christ. And the day after tomorrow, why should it not call upon us to attack our Lord and God, Jesus Christ himself? No doubt, in theory, it is always possible, when making an attack, to make distinctions. But in reality, God is *one*, and the Pope's representative is *one*, and the Pope is *one*. No distinction or division is admissible. This movement for triple autonomy would make it impossible for me to be a Catholic. For a 'patriotic' movement of this kind is in fact incompatible with that triple autonomy which is essential to the Catholic Church.

Gentlemen, I have only one soul, and it cannot be divided; but I have a body, which can be broken up. It seems best to me to offer my soul, whole and entire, to God and Holy Church, and my body to my country; if it wants it, I do not refuse it. Good materialists, who deny the existence of the soul, cannot fail to be satisfied with the offering of my body. I think that if the State and the Church could co-operate, then a movement for the true triple autonomy essential to the Church would be recognised as a patriotic movement. If it could be so, what benefits would result both for Church and State! But we go on, and they draw further and further away from each other. And we have almost reached the point at which it is impossible to turn back. Soon the last thread on which we could hang our hopes will be broken. I suffer, because there is nothing I can do; but since I have no power to remedy the situation, I can do nothing better than offer my soul to one side and my body to the other, in sacrifice, in the hope of helping them to a mutual understanding. Until this understanding has been achieved, there is nothing else I can do. But I have no regrets. I only pray to God to have pity on the weakness of my nature, to give me supernatural courage, and I shall remain unshakable until death. Even more, I beg the authorities to accept my sacrifice and to show me no indulgence. Above all, if I should falter, let them not tolerate such weakness. Are not the weak the scourge of society? Therefore, to arm myself in advance against all weakness, in case I should lose control of myself and use words of capitulation, I will take advantage of this moment, in which I am perfectly clear in my mind, to declare solemnly that I disclaim them and hold them for null and void.

The authorities have often clearly declared that their intention

is not to force our hand but only to arouse us to action. They thus make it a duty for me always to speak frankly and, even more, never to say what I do not mean: if I approve a declaration, to sign it sincerely, and if I do not approve it, not to give it a hypocritical signature. Have not the authorities clearly granted us liberty of speech and liberty to be silent? Why should we not trust the declarations of the authorities?

Supposing that, affected by some fear, I go against my conscience, speak against my thought and sign what I do not approve, then I am openly deceiving the authorities; and if afterwards I say that I have said what I did not mean because my hand was forced, then, equally, I am deceiving the hierarchy. Would not this be the way to sow discord between the Government and the Church? If I stifle the voice of conscience, deny God, abandon the Church and make a fool of the Government, then I am simply an opportunist and a coward. From then on I should be one of those miserable individuals in whom no one can have any confidence and whose life is of no use to anyone. Who would have any use for me then; who would give me his support? I should be a wretch, worthy of all the punishments the authorities could give me in this world and of the eternal sufferings of Divine Justice in the next.

I am a Catholic, it is true, but that does not stop me from having a very great admiration for the Communists. They do not believe in God or in the soul; still less in heaven and hell. I am convinced that in this they are mistaken. But they have more than one quality which forces my admiration, arouses me from my indolence and violently reminds me of the millions of martyrs in the Church's two thousand years. It is they who bring me to pray God day and night to forget my numerous sins and grant me the inestimable grace of martyrdom.

The first of these qualities in the Communists is their readiness to face death. They never deny themselves so as to deceive others on some excuse or other—like General Li Ling, who justified his surrender by saying: 'I did not go to my death because I was keeping myself for a future work'. And am I, a Catholic, to cling shamefully to life on the pretext that I must preserve myself so as to serve the Church later on? A Christian capable of betraying God is no longer fit for anything but to betray the Church and his country. The Communists like to say: 'For one man who falls,

ten thousand rise up'. Is a Catholic to forget that the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians?

The Communists' second quality is to have no fear of being accused of all kinds of crimes, nor of risking the death sentence. 'The eyes of the people', they say, 'see clearly and are not deceived.' And is a Christian to fear to be the object of evil and intolerable accusations? Is he to refuse an unjust death as something valueless and meaningless? Would not this be to forget that 'our supreme Judge is almighty God, full of wisdom and goodness; He is justice and equity themselves'?

The Communists have a third quality. When they are in the right, but cannot convince others of it, they keep their own faith intact. If they are defeated in discussion, they do not consider themselves justified in compromising their ideology, doubting the Party, and deserting. Can a Christian forget that his faith comes to him from God? Why should he let go, simply because he himself is not able to conduct a victorious defence? Is he to declare himself defeated in the name of the whole Church? This would bring him to falsify doctrine and alter discipline, to betray God and his soul. If I were really capable of betraying God and my soul, who could guarantee that I would not betray my country and the people? This is why I refuse to falter in my faith, and still more to shake the faith of other Christians—to abuse my position as a priest in order to shake the faith of the faithful.

The Communists whom I admire and the Government they control have a real consideration for the Church which I love, and they seek to gain the adherence of Christians. I say that I am greatly honoured. How then could I fail to redouble my efforts to be an unshakable Christian, fit to respond to the Government's noble intentions? I will not hang out a sheep's head in order to sell dog's flesh, for dog's flesh, however good it may smell, will never be mutton.

I will not stop short at admiring the unshakable courage of the Communists and thanking them for the noble intention with which they wish to win over the Christians. For beyond this I have a great desire, which is to offer them, in my turn, the Catholic Church which is so dear to me, to bring them to God and make them our brothers in the faith. Do not take me for a raving lunatic, nor believe that I am lacking in sincerity. I say that on the day when Communists with such ideals truly recognise the

Catholic Church, they will become Catholics so entirely given to the faith that they will be a thousand times better than such a Catholic as I. Therefore I pray God that in the heart of the Communist Party there may be many Sauls who will become Pauls and out-distance a hundred times a poor priest like myself. This is my most fervent prayer. It is on the point of being heard. For this I will spare no sacrifice, praying in the hope that the earthly life I offer today may be the price of the conversion of the generation to come.

This is the way I see the position. As to the imperfections in this discourse, I beg you to excuse a man who has been unable to give all the care to it that he would have wished. Furthermore, since I could not submit to it the approval of ecclesiastical authority, my discourse cannot of course represent the opinion of the Church. Nor has it received any recognition from public authority. It is thus only the expression of what seems to me to be the ideal, which is perhaps for the moment only a personal dream.

Conclusion. To sum up: I am a Chinese Catholic. I love my country, I also love my Church. I categorically reject all that is contrary to the laws of my country and to the laws of my Church, and above all I will not take part in anything that might give rise to discord. But if the Church and the Government cannot reach agreement, no Chinese Catholic will have anything to do, sooner or later, but to die. Then why should I not offer my life at once to hasten the mutual understanding of the two parties? If my request is not accepted, it must be because all understanding is refused and peace is rejected. I do not think that the Government will wish to condemn irrevocably to death all of us three million seven hundred thousand Chinese Catholics. But if any member of the Catholic hierarchy refused my request, or thought me an illuminist meddling in what is no concern of mine, he could suspend me, but he could not prevent me from appealing to a higher authority, even the Pope himself, if necessary. But if, in this desperate situation, we still have the courage to look for a solution, reconciliation may yet be achieved.

I ask your pardon for all the defects in this discourse.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.