



NEWS REPORT

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Bishop Fan Zhongliang: Better broken jade than intact tile

The Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples publishes a eulogy for the Bishop of Shanghai who died on March 16, on AsiaNews. A witness faithful to the Pope and the Chinese nation. As a sign of reconciliation and harmony, his funeral should be celebrated by Msgr. Ma Daqin, currently under house arrest.

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by Msgr Savio Hon Taifai



Vatican City (AsiaNews) - The following is a memorial and a eulogy of the figure of Msgr. Joseph Fan Zhongliang, Bishop of Shanghai, not recognized by the government, who died on March 16. The author is Msgr. Savio Hon Taifai, Secretary of the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, the only Chinese member of the Roman Curia. Archbishop Hon stresses that the deceased bishop, in his love for the Church and the Pope was also a great witness of love for his country and his people and set an example for many of the faithful. Archbishop Hon suggests the Chinese authorities free Msgr. Ma Daqin , currently under house arrest, to allow him celebrate the funeral of Mgr. Fans. Such a gesture would be an important gesture in reconciling the Christian community in Shanghai and for harmony and the good of the great Chinese metropolis.

When two days ago I received news of the death of Msgr. Joseph Fan Zhongliang, sadness immediately descended on my heart. But then, remembering who he was, I was comforted.

As the Chinese proverb says: "Better [to be] broken jade than intact tile". It was with this attitude that Msgr. Fan lived his life, which spanned a long and dramatic period, always under pressure, in varying degrees, from the political situation.



The bodily remains of Msgr. Fan in his room before being transported to a funeral home)

Already as a young man Msgr. Fans had remained faithful to Christ and to the Church, without this ever undermining his love for his nation China and its people.

Bishop Fan was a good pastor in every sense, who sacrificed everything for his sheep. He was a symbol for many Chinese Catholics, a symbol of faith in the Lord, despite having been subjected to so many difficulties, including imprisonment. He was a symbol of fidelity to his vocation, although tried for a long time by disease. He was a symbol of allegiance to the Pope, even if it cost him dearly.

When I was teaching in Shanghai in the 1990s, at the regional seminary of Sheshan , I was struck by the way in which the faithful and

also many young priests spoke of him with great love and respect.

Once he sent me a message of thanks because I had offered my time and my academic abilities to teach in China.

Within the context of his situation and the political regime, Bishop Fan's external freedom was always restricted, but not his interior freedom: a good Jesuit through and through, he always embraced God's will. This is why he was a symbol of freedom for all Catholics because they only thing he sought was the right to live according to the guarantee of freedom of religion and his loyalty to the Pope. This was also why he had to suffer, but his witness made Catholics even more determined and more in love with their country. They were and are committed to strive for

the good of their country and a greater humanization of their city. Love for God and love for the Pope does not preclude love for one's country.

His character was formed at the school of Card. Gong Pinmei. We can read a tradition common to both Card. Gong and Msgr. Fans. As Confucius says, they will not budge even a millimeter in their benevolence and solidarity.

Another characteristic element of Msgr. Fan was his magnanimity. Though belonging to the unofficial church, he never had harsh words or sectarian judgments of official Catholics. In his clarity and truth he also knew how to be gentle and merciful. This explains why over the years he was able to reconcile with Msgr. Jin Luxian, even if the paths that they had taken in the past were very different.

Bishop Fan died two days ago, Msgr. Jin died last year. But the Lord has not left the Church in Shanghai without a guide. On the surface there may seem to be a vacuum, but in reality, the presence of Msgr. Thaddeus Ma Daqin ensures continuity.

Shanghai Catholics feel the same respect and appreciation of Msgr. Ma. Maybe some criticize, but the majority follows him and loves him as the pastor of Shanghai. And it is a wonderful thing that he is the successor to both Msgr. Jin and Msgr. Fans. Through him the Church of Shanghai can really live a new era of reconciliation.

I believe that the government would do well to allow to Msgr. Ma celebrate the funeral of Msgr. Fan Zhongliang. It would be a respectful gesture towards religious freedom and towards an elderly person, such as Msgr. Fans. In addition, Msgr. Ma Daqin's presence would guarantee not only a fitting funeral, but also an experience of fraternity and harmony among Christians, from which the entire city could only benefit.