

between Grósz and János Berecz in the succession competition. As the Central Committee Secretary for Agitation and Propaganda, Berecz is largely responsible for the party's church policy, and is widely regarded as being less inclined to ideological flexibility than Grósz. We are likely to know whether the bishops have done well to lodge publicly their requests for radical reform with

Grósz only after the dust has settled from the extraordinary Conference of the Hungarian communist party, which is to take place in mid-May, after this piece has been written. Some senior party officials believe decisive battles regarding reform and the succession will be fought at this conference.

JOHN V. EIBNER

News of Chinese Churchmen

It may be remembered that Bishop Gong Pingmei was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1955 on a charge of high treason. He was released from prison in 1985, subject to surveillance by leaders of the Catholic Patriotic Association in Shanghai and without political rights. On 15 January 1988, his political rights were restored to him. His period of probation is now at an end. According to the New China Agency, he thanked the Government for its leniency, and promised to devote the remainder of his life to the modernisation of China.

A somewhat different version of the Bishop's reaction to his new freedom emerged from an interview with the French news agency AFP (quoted by the *Tablet* on 30 January). According to this source the Bishop declared: "I have remained true to the Roman Catholic Church. I am ready to go back to prison tomorrow to defend my faith. I would be a traitor if I had dreamt for a moment of denying my faith and the Vatican. Catholics cannot live without the moral authority of the Pope." Bishop Gong criticised the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association. It had "nothing to do with the Catholic Church", he said. He be-

lieved that about a dozen priests, all over fifty years old, had been arrested for their faith: "I do not know where they are. The communists sent them all to labour camps." The Bishop was unconvinced by the liberal policies of Peking. "I abstain from all judgement," he declared. "I have no interest in politics." For the first time he spoke about his experiences in detention. He was never tortured, he said, but he was not able to say Mass, or read the Bible or any other religious work. "I had the right only to Shakespeare." He added that he was free to leave China.

It has also been announced officially in the People's Republic of China that two Jesuits who had remained faithful to the Vatican were released on parole on 17 November 1987. These were Bishop Joseph Fan Xueyan of Baoding and Fr Chen Yuntang. Bishop Fan was the last bishop to be consecrated with Vatican approval.

It was emphasised by Chinese spokesmen that the churchmen had been released in accordance with ordinary legal procedures. The releases had nothing to do with diplomatic moves to prepare the way for a new relationship with the Holy See.

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