

MARTYRS IN DESIRE: THE STORY OF PASSIONIST FATHERS GODFREY HOLBEIN, CLEMENT SEYBOLD, WALTER COVEYOU, AND CONSTANTINE LEECH

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Part I:

Introduction¹

Chinese is a tonal language,² an aspect that has confounded many a western missionary who ventured to the Far East and attempted to learn some variant of it. This means that the same sound spoken with different intonations, or “tones,” will have various meanings. For example, depending upon how it is spoken, the sound “si” translates into the number four (sì) or the word death (sǐ). As a result, Chinese speakers consider the number four highly unlucky.³

One wonders if this unsettling bit of trivia crossed the minds of American Passionist missionaries laboring in Hunan, China, in 1929. According to the Gregorian calendar, in the fourth week of the fourth month of that year, four of their brethren died in their efforts to bring Christ to pagan China.⁴ Passionist Fathers Godfrey Holbein, Clement Seybold, and Walter Coveyou were murdered by bandits on Wednesday, April 24 – the fourth day of that harrowing week. The fourth priest, Father Constantine Leech succumbed to a weeklong battle with typhoid fever on Friday, April 26.

Every Passionist missionary in Hunan accepted the grim likelihood of violence or disease claiming his life and cutting his ministry short. When they boarded passenger ships to China, they expected to die in their adopted country.⁵ Four priests dying at once shocked them to the core. Many considered it a special grace from God that the press had begun broadcasting news of the event throughout the United States on April 28, 1929, which at that time was the feast day of St. Paul of the Cross, founder of the Passionist Congregation.⁶

Even more vexing was the question of whether their brethren could be declared martyrs – especially Fathers Holbein, Seybold, and Coveyou. By definition, a martyr is killed as a direct result of his or her faith.⁷ To this day, the motivation for the murders is still a matter of scholarly debate, but all theories indicate that the bandits likely acted out of desire for material gain, or as part of a larger political agenda. Moreover, the death of Father Constantine Leech resulted from natural causes. Staunch adherents of the canonical definition objected to the priests being glorified as martyrs. But another audience adopted a different opinion: friends, family, and a larger Catholic community who had followed the struggles of these men in Catholic periodicals like *The Sign*, *The Catholic Tele-*

graph, and *The Shield*.⁸ They observed their suffering in the midst of war, famine, primitive conditions, and political hostility against the West – all in the name of Christ. To them, these priests were martyrs, just of a different variety.

Who Are the Passionists?

The religious congregation to which Fathers Holbein, Seybold, Coveyou, and Leech belonged was founded in December 1720 by Italian mystic Paolo Francesco Danei, also known as St. Paul of the Cross.⁹ The official canonical title of the order is the Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ.¹⁰ The Passionists follow a contemplative lifestyle structured around prayer and apostolic service, and they live by a distinctive creed: they promote remembrance of the Passion as a way to seek personal union with God



**Thanksgiving Day at Paotsing [Baojing], China (year unknown).
L to R: Passionist Fathers Basil Bauer, Constantine Leech,
Raphael Vance, and Caspar Conley**

Source: Passionist Historical Archives

and reflect upon the meaning of human suffering, keeping the *actuality* of the Passion alive in society.¹¹ For a Passionist, Christ's presence exists in all who suffer. In addition to the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, members take a special fourth vow to keep alive the memory of Christ's suffering on the Cross, and they dedicate their lives to this pursuit through their ministry, missionary work, and retreats.¹²

The Passionists are also defined by their habit – a long, black tunic of coarse wool bound at the waist by a leather belt. The robe is adorned by a seal worn over the heart to denote its purity for the love of Christ. The seal is a heart surmounted by a cross, inscribed with the words *Jesu XPI Passio* in Greek and Latin. A curved mark

appears over the *XPI*, indicating that it is an abbreviation for Christ in Greek. Three nails appear below the letters, intimating that the memory of the Passion and Crucifixion must always be kept in the heart. The seal may also be worn on a cloak over the left arm as a shield against the powers of darkness.¹³ They are historically *discalced*, meaning that they wear sandals on their feet.¹⁴

According to the original Rule, members of the congregation strive for an interior life governed by prayer and austerity. They rise from a bed of straw to chant Matins and Lauds, the midnight observance, and spend time in meditation.¹⁵ They pause for prayer at canonical hours – at three, six, nine, and twelve, both morning and afternoon – and in addition to avoiding meat during Lent and Advent, they also abstain three days a week throughout the year.¹⁶

After the founder’s death in 1775, the congregation slowly expanded beyond its birthplace in Italy, and missions were launched to Belgium, England, France, Holland, Australia, and the United States.¹⁷ During a trip to Rome, Bishop Michael O’Connor, first bishop of Pittsburgh, learned of the mission of the Passionists and formally requested that the congregation be established in his diocese.¹⁸ In 1852, he accompanied the Passionist pioneers from Rome to Pittsburgh.¹⁹ The priests had no funds and spoke only broken English, and during the first years of their mission, the bishop assumed financial responsibility for their lodging and language study. However, the Passionists soon impressed the Catholic community of Pittsburgh, and within two years they acquired enough funding to build their first monastery on a steep hill in the southern part of the city – Blessed Paul of the Cross, which would later be renamed St. Paul of the Cross after the founder’s canonization in 1867.

As the Passionist pioneers gained competency in English, their apostolic activity expanded and new sites were added throughout the Eastern and Midwestern United States. The following foundations were added within sixty years of the Passionist arrival. The foundation in Dunkirk, New York, served as a center of Passionist education throughout the United States.²⁰

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	1852
Dunkirk, New York	1860
Union City, New Jersey	1861
Baltimore, Maryland	1865
Cincinnati, Ohio	1871
Louisville, Kentucky	1879
St. Louis, Missouri	1884
St. Paul, Kansas	1894
Scranton, Pennsylvania	1902
Chicago, Illinois	1904

The territorial expansion prompted the provincial chapter of

1906 to divide the American province, using the Ohio River as the boundary. Foundations east of the river belonged to St. Paul of the Cross Province, and those west of the river fell under the new Holy Cross Province.

In addition to rapid growth, the early years were characterized by a period of acculturation for the founders. Their efforts to expand the American province coincided with the outbreak of the American Civil War and an era of increased immigration. The country was deeply polarized and conditions were chaotic. According to the Passionist Rule, the congregation limited itself to establishing



Hunan Province, site of Passionist missions in China

Source: Katherine Koch

monasteries, yet the pioneers found themselves entangled in parish organization and ministry. Moreover, in their native Italy, church congregations were stirred by emotional sermons and elaborate ceremonies. In contrast, the American mentality favored practicality.²¹

In the end, the religious adapted to their new situation. Father Anthony Testa, the Passionist superior general, permitted them to engage in parish life with a cautious approach, letting the priests most involved with an individual foundation make decisions locally. In the matter of maintaining the Rule, they wisely continued to uphold its original spirit, especially in the training of novices. They adapted their preaching style as well, favoring a more intellectual style of ministry. The success of their approach is confirmed by the comments of James Cardinal Gibbons, archbishop of Baltimore.²² He praised them with the following words:

They were international men; they became all things to all men; they identified themselves with our country; they became Americans. Their work proves that the rule and spirit of St. Paul of the Cross are adapted to every clime and every age.... I knew the Founders personally and admired them. They upheld the highest type of the Roman ecclesiastic; they were simple in faith and affable in manner, holy in life, great in work. Though not intimately acquainted



Passionist mission area in western Hunan, showing mission locations and site of murder of three Passionists in April 1929

Source: Katherine Koch

with the language of the country, their sermons always went to the hearts of the people. Their very presence and appearance seemed to reveal the presence of the Holy Spirit in them. Hence, they won the love and veneration of the American people.²³

The founders truly “became Americans,” made evident by the fact that they devoted themselves to their mission and died on American soil. The remains of all four men lie at rest in the crypt of St. Paul of the Cross Monastery in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.²⁴

The Passionists in China

In 1920, a new era dawned for the American Passionists. A long and devastating war had just ended in Europe. During its course, a vast number of European priests had been wrenched from mission territories around the world to serve as military chaplains. In November 1919, Pope Benedict XV issued the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*, calling for a revival of missionary work.²⁵ The pope placed special emphasis upon pagan lands in the Far East.²⁶

St. Paul of the Cross Province answered this call.²⁷ When the Twentieth Chapter convened August 20-28, 1920, capitulars unanimously voted to send missionaries to China.²⁸ They perceived China as a vital mission territory: its pagan population offered fertile ground for converts, and thus it was a logical choice for a new missionary adventure. St. Paul of the Cross Province was financially stable, its membership flourishing. It had the manpower to support the venture.²⁹ Provincials of the time, Father Justin

Carey (1920-1923) and Father Stanislaus Grennan (1923-1929), were looking for new ways of spreading the Passionist charism.³⁰

The congregation would share responsibility for a mission district in western Hunan that had been previously established by Spanish Augustinians.³¹ The Passionists spoke no Chinese, yet this did not deter them. They were headed for a country embroiled in political turmoil: after thousands of years of imperial rule, China was fighting to become a republic, and rapacious warlords vied for control over vast swaths of territory.³² Bandits posed a constant threat to life and property. The missionaries were unfazed by this as well. The pioneers that set sail from Italy to America in 1852 had spoken no English, and they had succeeded in a country sundered by civil war.³³ The American Passionists bound for China dreamed of walking in their footsteps, bringing Christ Crucified to a land wracked by suffering, establishing a flourishing province, and in the end, being laid to rest in their adopted country.³⁴

On December 25, 1921, the first Passionist mission band departed Seattle and set sail for China.³⁵ Upon arrival in Hunan, they expected an extended period of service under the guidance of veteran Augustinians. They stepped onto Chinese soil in time to witness a raging famine, and conditions compelled the newcomers to take complete charge after only a few months of intense training. Their appeal for immediate assistance prompted a second wave of Passionists to prepare for labors in the Chinese mission field.³⁶ A third mission band slated for arrival in 1923 would bring the first martyr in desire, Father Constantine Leech.³⁷

The Sign

While American Passionists were launching missions to China, they embarked upon another venture destined to evolve into an important vehicle for promoting and supporting Chinese missionary work. In August 1921, the first issue of *The Sign* was published in West Hoboken, New Jersey. A monthly magazine written by Passionists for an American Catholic audience, it sought to make Christ Crucified better known to readers.³⁸

Support of the Chinese missions was not a motivating factor in the origins of *The Sign*. At first, China was merely interesting news. The launch of the first mission band received extensive coverage, starting with the article, “China Calls,” in the November 1921 issue.³⁹ The following spring, Provincial Justin Carey made a dramatic decision that forever connected *The Sign* with the China missions. Father Cuthbert O’Gara witnessed the episode:

During lent of 1922 the provincial, Father Justin, was in the infirmary with a severe sprained ankle.... I recall one day a commotion in the little infirmary corridor and Father Harold (Purcell), managing editor of the *Sign* magazine, being called into the provincial’s room. I later on heard Father Harold’s version of the incident. The first band of missionaries to China had by that time arrived in western Hunan where they found famine conditions raging. The need was great and urgent. Father Celestine, the superior, appealed to the provincial for funds. The provincial called on Father Harold, who dipped into the capital on hand (money earned by the *Sign*) to supply the

need of the moment. I have always been of the opinion it was from that day that the needs of China became a primary concern of the *Sign*.⁴⁰

Thus, in addition to furnishing financial support from American readers, *The Sign* became a primary vehicle through which China entered into the mainstream consciousness of American Catholics. By June 1922, “With the Passionists in China” became a fixture in every issue.⁴¹ The section consisted of letters composed by the missionaries, or editorials that summarized conditions in Hunan. Articles on the China missions also appeared in *The Catholic Telegraph*. By January 1924, news from Passionist missionaries regularly appeared in its columns.⁴²

Part II:

First Martyr in Desire: Father Constantine Leech

Fellow missionaries describe Father Constantine Leech as a wholesome, John Wayne-type that compatriots admired and imitated.⁴³ He made light of difficulties and lived by the philosophy, “The man worthwhile is the man who can smile when everything goes dead wrong.”⁴⁴ After becoming a veteran in China, he amazed comrades by taking mule rides up narrow mountain passes that offered no protection from a thousand-foot drop, all while nodding off in the saddle, legs crossed as if sitting in an armchair, never afraid for a moment.⁴⁵ Collectively, the martyrs in desire demonstrate a kaleidoscope of missionary experience. Father Constantine conveys the story of the early arrivals who struggled to break ground in the Passionist China foundation.

He entered American Catholic mainstream consciousness in the August 1923 issue of *The Sign*, in an editorial penned by managing editor Father Harold Purcell, titled, “Off for the High Romance!”⁴⁶ Father Constantine Leech, a thirty-one year old native of Pittsburgh, had joined the third wave of American Passionists bound for China.⁴⁷ He was shorter in stature – only 5’6” – and his piercing blue eyes, high forehead, and wavy silver hair already made him look like a veteran priest.⁴⁸ Born Andrew Leech on January 17, 1892, in the old Manchester district of the North Side, he was the youngest child of John F. Leech and Mary A. Carlin.⁴⁹ He entered the Passionist preparatory college in Dunkirk, New York, in 1911, and made his religious profession on May 5, 1914. Freshly ordained by Bishop Hugh C. Boyle at St. Vincent Archabbey in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, on February 4, 1923, he would devote his life to missionary work in wild and rugged Hunan. His father had passed away in November of 1892, a mere ten months after the son was born.⁵⁰ An older brother, John H. Leech, had passed away in 1910. On August 6, 1923, when Father Constantine traveled to Seattle and boarded the *S.S. President Grant*, he bid farewell to his only remaining immediate family members – his mother Mary and older sister Mary C. Leech.

Passionists in China were encouraged to write for *The Sign*, conveying the trials of missionary experience to American readers. During his six-year tenure in China, Father Constantine proved a prolific author, penning at least twelve articles for the magazine (the last would be published posthumously). By the time of his death in April 1929, he was a well-known figure.

RETREAT OF 1929. THE THREE MISSIONARIES (X) WERE KILLED RETURNING TO THEIR MISSIONS FROM THIS RETREAT.



Passionist attendees at Chenzhou retreat in April 1929 included three that would be murdered after departure: (1) Father Godfrey Holbein in front row, far right, (2) Father Walter Coveyou in second row, second from left, and (3) Father Clement Seybold in second row, third from right

Source: Passionist Historical Archives

The Mission Experience:⁵¹**The Mission Territory and Language**

The reputation of 1920s Hunan is best conveyed by an anecdote from missionary Father Caspar Conley. The priest journeyed to Shanghai for medical treatment. Upon hearing that his patient hailed from Hunan, the doctor exclaimed, “That was like crossing the great divide [in America] and going into the wild west!”⁵²

The perception was well merited. Hunan was one of the last provinces that had opened its borders to foreigners. The Passionist mission territory was vast: 15,400 square miles, an area equaling the combined American states of Delaware, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. In the beginning they managed seven missions at Chenzhou, Chenxi, Xupu, Qianyang, Yuanzhou, Baojing, and Yongshun.⁵³ Venturing to a neighboring mission involved days of travel over treacherous mountain passes or river routes that churned with rapids. Modes of transportation were equally primitive: missionaries journeyed by mule, on foot, or via river by *sampán*, a flat-bottomed skiff made from three planks of wood.⁵⁴ At times they also hired coolies to carry them by sedan chair.

Travel was part of daily life. Each mission had a number of “out stations” or villages where there were Christians but no permanent residence for the priest, only a hut or chapel to stay for a short period of time. Visiting an out station required the missionary to pack bed and bedding, food and clothes, Mass kit, lanterns – anything necessary to sustain him, or fulfill his duties during the trip. In addition, the threat of bandits frequently compelled them to request a military escort by Chinese soldiers. Most missions were equipped with a revolver for the missionary’s protection.⁵⁵

In this regard, Father Constantine’s articles in *The Sign* demonstrate his inclination to make light of difficulties, and his enthusiasm for strenuous mountain travel. He preferred traveling on “Nancy,” his trusty mule.⁵⁵ Fellow missionary Father Agatho Purtill attested that he “lived in the saddle.”⁵⁷ Writing about his travels – most of which required days to reach his destination – he imbued his writing with lavish detail, describing “low valleys with rivers or creeks winding around mountain bases, sparkling in the glorious sunlight like streams of molten silver.”⁵⁸ The threat of banditry also pervaded his stories. When fully aware that his trek would take him through bandit territory, he rode close to carriers hauling his luggage, or took detours along rugged mountain passes to circumvent known bandit haunts.⁵⁹

The first and second bands of Passionist missionaries in China established a process for new recruits: they lived at the main mission in Chenzhou and studied the Chinese language. In *Maximum Illud*, Pope Benedict XV had stressed the importance of learning the native language to ensure apostolic success, and thus the Passionists made linguistic study a priority. Fulfilling this directive was far from easy. The Chinese language relies upon a tonal system. The meaning of one word may differ depending on whether it is spoken in one of four Mandarin (official Chinese) tones, or in eight Cantonese tones. The challenge was compounded by the prospect of having to write in Chinese as well, and attempting to understand the various combinations of characters.⁶⁰ To illustrate

the difficulty:

There are approximately 880 phonetics which together with radicals (some of which double as phonetics) make up the 1,000 basic forms a student must know to be able to read and write all Chinese characters. The task requires persistence, hours of practice, and constant review.⁶¹

Father Constantine arrived in Chenzhou in late September 1923.⁶² By March of 1924 he was already stationed at Yongshun, working as an assistant to Father Agatho Purtill.⁶³ To fellow missionaries, it was a brief learning period. He apparently preferred to learn Chinese out in the field, among the people. Eager to start his life’s work, he wrote the following from Yongshun:

I am glad to be here. . . . Language, food, climate, bandits, and all other fears and difficulties are gradually giving way to my strong determination to do as much good as possible for God, and His Church, and the salvation of souls.⁶⁴

Father Constantine’s brief study in the language is likely another instance where he made light of difficulties. The experience of fellow missionaries demonstrates that the struggle to learn Chinese severely hampered their work. For example, Father Agatho Purtill, a member of the second mission band, frequently lamented that two Spanish Augustinians had left him alone in the mission at Yongshun, leaving one third of the entire district on his shoulders with no knowledge of the language.⁶⁵ Father Celestine Roddan, the first mission superior, identified language difficulties as the reason why the Passionist introduction did not proceed more smoothly during the first year.⁶⁶ It was not uncommon for the language barrier to result in nervous breakdowns among the missionaries and their staff.⁶⁷

Difficulties and Adaptations to China

Father Constantine’s penchant for smiling in the face of difficulties worked to his benefit, and demonstrates the type of missionary that China needed. His predecessors in the first and second missionary bands had been beset by challenges that threatened their very identity as Passionists. Thus, like the founders who ventured from Italy to America, they discovered a need for adaptation to a new culture, climate, language, and realities that impacted religious observance.

Father Celestine found that his decisions incited the indignation of Provincials in the United States and resigned his position as superior within a year. He had departed America with the intention of transplanting the Passionist spirit to China, opening monasteries and establishing an environment conducive to training native Chinese in contemplation and prayer. Upon arrival, he discussed the matter with veteran missionaries from other monastic orders in the country, most of whom had attempted and failed to establish novitiate houses.⁶⁸ Perceiving futility in the effort, Celestine reallocated money earmarked for the founding of monasteries and instead spent it on grain to feed Chinese beggars trapped in the midst of a horrific famine. American Provincial Father Justin Carey called him to task for the decision.⁶⁹ In addition, the tem-

perature of a Hunan summer frequently soared to a torrid 105°, making the traditional woolen habit virtually impossible to wear.⁷⁰ Father Justin's successor, Provincial Father Stanislaus Grennan, wrote a letter condemning Father Celestine for following the example of Jesuits, Augustinians, and Franciscans in China, and trading the habit and sandals for cooler silk robes.⁷¹

Dispensation was eventually given to the Passionists in China to don Chinese garb under certain conditions.⁷² Father Constantine, however, was a proponent of the habit and wore it on days when the summer heat turned oppressive. He would not let personal comfort diminish his identity as a Passionist. Moreover, he believed that the habit conveyed an important message to the Chinese.

His [Father Constantine's] one great idea was that all missionaries wear their habits in their mission house, so that we would impress upon the Chinese that we were not, as they often think, rich foreigners, but religious men devoted only to the sublime purpose of the salvation of our souls and those of fellow men.⁷³

The vastness of the western Hunan mission territory introduced yet another difficulty. In the United States, the priests regularly enjoyed communal prayer – one of the hallmarks of Passionist life. In China, the distance between missions meant that each would live in solitude, especially in the early years of the China foundation. Only a fortunate few enjoyed the company of a junior missionary. In lieu of communal service, the Passionists decided that every missionary should spend one half hour of prayer in preparation for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and one half-hour in thanksgiving afterward. Additionally, time should be set aside for spiritual reading and the Divine Office.⁷⁴ As fellow missionaries attest, Father Constantine assiduously kept his horarium and followed it to the letter.⁷⁵

Challenges in Evangelization

Father Constantine numbered among the first Passionists to regularly convey the difficulties of evangelization to an American audience via *The Sign*. Introducing Christianity to a pagan culture constituted a major challenge. Chinese catechists were indispensable: trained in doctrine, they spoke the language and communicated the missionary's purpose to the natives.⁷⁶ Dispensary work provided the means for a missionary to introduce himself to the locals. Stationed in areas of China where the natives had never seen a doctor in their lives, the Passionists received basic medical training before departing from the States.⁷⁷ The ability to heal even minor ailments engendered a sense of trust in the missionaries, paving the way for opportunities at evangelism.

At times, Father Constantine employed creative solutions to attract converts. While trekking through the countryside to visit satellite missions around Yongshun, he brought a phonograph borrowed from Father Agatho and set it up in the middle of a village. Citizens flocked to hear the music, and between pieces, they absorbed Catholic doctrine. The tactic succeeded in holding the attention of Chinese who would never have come otherwise.⁷⁸

One incident outside the Yongshun mission conveys Father Constantine's devotion to converts. In 1924, he enjoyed visits by a Chinese laborer who performed odd jobs around the mission and, at times, attend Mass or catechism classes. One day he vanished, apparently to join the army. Word later arrived at the mission that the soldier was accused of participating in a robbery, which earned him a death sentence. Fathers Agatho and Constantine hastened to the jail where he was being held. Just minutes before his execution, the priests managed to baptize him. For Father Constantine, the work to save a soul did not end there:

Pushing my way through the returning soldiers and the crowd following them, I made my way to what remained of those unfortunate men. I quickly raised my hand over the bleeding body [of the Chinese laborer] and gave him conditional absolution, hoping and praying that God would pardon him and have mercy on his soul. His body lay forward on the ground, his hands tied behind his back. The head severed entirely from the shoulders lay at one side where it had rolled.... And thus ended another of China's many tragedies.⁷⁹

Father Constantine wrote with candor about the difficulties of mission life. During another incident in 1924, Father Agatho informed him of a Chinese woman who was dying and requesting a priest. Father Constantine embarked upon a day-long hike through mountain passes too dangerous for a mule, weathering a downpour, slippery roads, and a guide that took a wrong turn, only to finally reach the woman and find her seated by a fire with her family – apparently in decent health. She was not baptized, and since there was no danger of death, Father Constantine could only return home from a pointless quest.⁸⁰ Yet, he made no complaint, not even when his carrier accidentally dropped his Mass kit in the river during the return trip. His forbearance is evident in the way he summed up the tale for readers of *The Sign*: "Such is life in China." Instances such as this did not faze him. Father Agatho merely intimated the need to make a sick call, and Father Constantine's face brightened at the prospect of another journey.⁸¹

Besides performing routine sick calls, visiting satellite stations, and engaging in evangelization with great zest, Father Constantine also inspired fellow missionaries with his precision in religious observance. His deep spirituality evidenced itself in a desire for perfection in all things. He rigidly adhered to the most minute rubric prescribed for Holy Mass. His Chinese altar boys executed their duties flawlessly. Fellow Passionists were elated when he joined them for Holy Week, for they were certain to have beautifully celebrated Masses. They unanimously praised this trait in his character.⁸²

This meticulous nature had a twofold impact upon Father Constantine's life as a missionary. While enthusiastic Chinese Christians heartened him, lukewarm converts, decisions to skip the sacrament of confession before Holy Mass, or the outright failure to attend Mass grieved him.

Work among the Chinese has two sides to it. There is the consoling side; when you see Christians converted from

pagan idolatry and kneeling in humble adoration before the True God in His Eucharistic Home, when you hear their voices sing out God's praises ... all this and more urges on a missionary to do everything possible to bring these millions of souls to the Sacred Heart. The other side of missionary life is the gloomy discouraging one....

Why am I telling all this? Well, it is the truth and you might as well know things as they really are. Discouraging things meet the missionaries here every day. Sometimes you wish some of the [people] would not come to the Sacraments. You have reason to doubt their sincerity ... [they] have no desire to learn what Christianity is and much less do they care to be converted to it. We ask for prayers and even more fervent prayers not only to obtain converts but also that the people will obtain the gift of a strong faith.⁸³

Father Constantine in Longshan

The valiant missionary often remarked that major events of his life usually occurred on Fridays. Thus, it was his favorite weekday. He had learned of his appointment as a China missionary on a Friday. He first arrived in China on a Friday. Father Constantine considered it auspicious that he reach Longshan – the mission destined to be his home for the rest of his life – on a Friday.⁸⁴

In April 1926, the Passionist, undaunted by mountain travel, hiked up a trail 7,000 feet above sea level and gazed down upon Longshan (Dragon Mountain). A jagged city wall inspired the town's name: it projected from the mountainside, its twists and crags resembling a dragon.⁸⁵ Longshan was the most remote location in the Passionist mission territory. A Western traveler making the trek to the mountain village felt as if he was leaving civilization behind.⁸⁶ The closest mission was Yongshun, a three-day journey. Father Constantine was the first white man that the inhabitants had seen. At first they bolted if he spoke to them, but gradually they warmed to him. His catechist announced to locals that the *Sen Fu* – Spiritual Father – was a wonderful medicine man, and the magistrate hung a placard in the city announcing the mission's doctrine and purpose. Both afforded Father Constantine opportunities to interact with inhabitants.⁸⁷

Like his Passionist forefathers, Father Constantine was “simple in faith and affable in manner, holy in life, great in work.” His description of the Longshan mission reflects his staunch spirit of poverty and determination to succeed:

The priest's room, servants' quarters, are all under the roof of one rented Chinese house. Small as my room is, part of it cannot be used. The roof leaks. The house is ancient and leans to one side. We are wretchedly poor.... My bed is a door placed on two wooden horses. Even these I had to borrow. The altar is likewise a borrowed door placed on some sort of an improvised stand – also borrowed. But I am trying to get things into shape and striving my utmost to give the place the appearance of a real Mission.... I do not grow discouraged at the circumstances.⁸⁸

In Longshan, Father Constantine found himself pitted against a formidable ideological foe: He Long. A bandit leader who eventually joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1926 – the year Father Constantine rode into Longshan – He Long⁸⁹ enjoyed a reputation akin to that of Robin Hood. In northern Hunan, he controlled territory through which rich opium caravans passed from the neighboring province of Yunnan to the city of Hankou. Rather than extracting his living by force from civilians like other bandits and warlords, he earned a living for himself and his men by taxing convoys, stealing from the rich. His father was a member of the *Gelaobui* (Elder Brother Society), and this connection garnered He Long fame throughout China. The *Gelaobui* fomented anti-Western sentiment and had a history of attacking Catholic missions and converts.⁹⁰ A cowherd in his youth, He Long claimed no formal education, yet he was a charismatic speaker who could “raise the dead to fight.”⁹¹ At first Father Constantine brimmed with hope at evangelizing Longshan. Thirty boys attended the school he opened in the mountain town, but they shied from further involvement: in their eyes, mere enrollment in doctrine classes ensured their standing as “good Christians.” Studying their religious indifference, Father Constantine concluded that He Long's influence prevented them from becoming active Christians.⁹²

Of all the sufferings Father Constantine endured in Christ's name, fellow missionary Father Cuthbert O'Gara reveals that solitude in distant Longshan may have been his greatest cross to bear.⁹³ Father Cuthbert was stationed alone at a new mission in Wuxi. On one occasion, the two priests discussed the effects of loneliness:

He made a remark which struck me at the time and which I remember quite clearly.... He maintained that a missionary should always have a companion, stating that he had experienced both ways of living, knew the nervous strain, and was convinced that a man should not be alone. In view of the fact that Father Constantine's mission was the most remote in the Prefecture and that he was destined to spend many solitary, harassing months there I often speculated as to how he managed to carry on, feeling as he did; and I am now convinced that he suffered far more than any of us can well realize.⁹⁴

Hunan in the 1920s: A Political Cauldron

Harassment of Passionist missionaries by bandits and Father Constantine's trials with He Long were symptoms of the ills that plagued 1920s China.⁹⁵ After the fall of the Qing dynasty, the country lost all appearance of stability. Regional armies and militias seized power over swaths of territory, their fragile coalitions swelling and waning as alliances shifted from one warlord to another. Two parties groped for political control: the Guomindang and the Communists.⁹⁶ Under the leadership of Dr. Sun Yat-sen and his successor Chiang Kai-shek, the Guomindang sought to unify China by fostering nationalism and democracy, while the Communists under Mao Zedong sought to unify the country through social revolution. In addition, events such as the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 and the May 30 Incident – a case where British Municipal Police in Shanghai fired upon Chinese protesters – brewed anti-foreign sentiment throughout the country.⁹⁷ Yet



Father Godfrey Holbein

Source: Passionist Historical Archives

another massacre occurred in Shaji, Guanzhou Province, when British and French troops guarding foreign concessions exchanged fire, killing Chinese demonstrators in the process.⁹⁸ As the country weathered profound political changes, the Passionist missionaries would soon find themselves struggling not for converts, but survival.

Part III:

Second and Third Martyrs in Desire:

Fathers Godfrey Holbein and Clement Seybold

When Father Constantine embarked on the voyage to China, his fellow Passionists in America viewed missionary work in the pagan country as “high romance.” By 1924, *The Sign* and *The Catholic Telegraph* regularly reported dramatic incidents from mission life: famines exacerbated by droughts and civil war, armed bandits, robberies at gunpoint, life-threatening travel through surging rapids and soaring mountain passes.⁹⁹ When the Passionists decided to send a fourth mission band to China, the prospect of danger heightened American awareness that missionary work involved more than a romantic quest for conversion: it was a journey into calamities that could result in a priest’s death.

American Provincial Father Stanislaus Grennan was a catalyst for growth of the China missions and a dynamic personality who ardently supported the effort. A magnificent preacher, he spoke often about China during parish missions, glamorizing the undertaking and proclaiming it as “a great sacrifice,” and a “chance

for martyrdom.”¹⁰⁰ A teacher of sacred eloquence (the one-year course following ordination to the priesthood in which priests were taught the art of public preaching), he held audiences spellbound.¹⁰¹ His enthusiasm proved infectious for Passionist novices who were pondering their future. One student in Pittsburgh wrote his sister:

We sometimes hear from our missionaries in China. They are most enthusiastic over their singular vocation. It is true they have to suffer hardships and inconveniences of all kinds, but the peace and happiness they enjoy and the blessings and graces both they and their relatives receive, more than compensate for their heroic self denial. . . . What would you say if our Lord would call me? You would willingly give me to Him, would you not?¹⁰²

The student was Claude Alphonsus Holbein, who changed his name to “Godfrey” when he took his vows as a Passionist in 1917.¹⁰³ He was born in Baltimore, Maryland on February 4, 1899 to Frank L. Holbein and Mary E. Kelley.¹⁰⁴ Standing 5’11, he was boyishly handsome: wavy brown hair, blue eyes, fair skin, an oval face, and a winsome smile.¹⁰⁵ From the start he exhibited “a loveable disposition,” an attribute that fellow missionaries also noted and admired later in his life. Claude was one of eight children; four of them (including Claude) eventually joined religious orders.¹⁰⁶ His father died when he was very young. According to family tradition, he was destined for the Catholic priesthood. When Claude was three months old, his family visited his sister who had become a nun, and during a church service he pointed to the tabernacle keyhole atop the altar. This, the family believed, demonstrated his strong spiritual devotion.

At age eight he attended a parish mission given at St. Joseph’s Monastery Parish in Baltimore, conducted by Passionist Father James Molloy. At that time, Claude heard his calling to the Catholic priesthood – and to the Passionist order.¹⁰⁷ After graduating from St. Joseph School in Baltimore in 1911, he enrolled in the Passionist Preparatory College at St. Mary’s Monastery in Dunkirk, New York. On May 15, 1916, he was clothed in the Passionist habit, and on May 16, 1917, he professed his vows as a Passionist in Pittsburgh.¹⁰⁸ Through the course of his novitiate his studies took him to Scranton, Pennsylvania; Brighton, Massachusetts; and also West Hoboken, New Jersey, where he would first hear about Passionist missions to China.

Another classmate of Confrator Godfrey Holbein was also destined for missionary work in China: Confrator Clement Seybold. A native of New York state, he was born in Dunkirk on April 19, 1896, to Simon and Mary Seybold.¹⁰⁹ He was baptized “Lawrence,” after a saint martyred by the Romans.¹¹⁰ He also had two sisters and four brothers – one of whom followed him into the Passionist order.¹¹¹ Young Lawrence grew up on a farm without indoor plumbing, and his chores consisted of bringing horses and cows to the creek during the summer, or shoveling snow to make drinkable water during the winter. As he matured, his character began to fit his future religious name; indeed, he was clement. Fellow students described him as modest, humble, and reserved; cheer-

ful, but never boisterous; enthusiastic, but never hasty, and even under the most trying conditions he remained calm. In all studies he applied himself with due diligence, always producing quality results regardless of the branch of work or science involved. His appearance befit his temperament: standing 5'7", he had wavy brown hair, a refined, studious countenance, and serious blue eyes that gazed contemplatively behind round glasses.¹¹²

In 1915, at age nineteen, Lawrence Seybold graduated from St. Mary's Academy – the school of St. Mary's, Dunkirk, a parish operated by the Passionists – and enrolled in the Passionist Preparatory College in Baltimore.¹¹³ Three years later he entered the novitiate at St. Paul of the Cross in Pittsburgh, where he took his vows as a Passionist and accepted his religious name on September 17, 1918. His theological studies took him to Scranton, Pennsylvania, and West Hoboken, New Jersey, where he likely became a classmate of Godfrey Holbein. On September 18, 1921, two Maryknoll priests visited St. Michael's Monastery Church in West Hoboken and conducted a mission appeal for China. Later that same day, a Columban missionary described work underway in Hunan. It is likely that both Godfrey Holbein and Clement Seybold attended the events and found inspiration for their vocation.¹¹⁴

Soon after the event at St. Michael Church, Father Stanislaus Grennan requested volunteers for the Passionist Chinese missions to Hunan.¹¹⁵ Confrator Godfrey volunteered immediately, begging his superiors for the favor to make Christ known in pagan China. Confrator Clement returned home to Dunkirk to attend the funeral of his mother and returned in March 1922 with acute mastoiditis, an infection impacting bones behind the ear.¹¹⁶ Doctors performed surgery, leaving Clement deaf with little hope of recovering his hearing.¹¹⁷ He prayed that, if his hearing were restored, he would offer himself to the China missions. Soon after recovering, he followed through with his promise and submitted himself as a candidate.¹¹⁸

In September of 1923, eight seminarians were chosen from St. Paul of the Cross Province to join the China missions – including both Confrators Clement Seybold and Godfrey Holbein. For the first time since the China missions began, Holy Cross, the Passionist province west of the Ohio River, contributed four priests. Father Cuthbert O'Gara, a professor at Holy Cross Preparatory College in Dunkirk, New York, also joined the band.¹¹⁹ Together they formed a company of thirteen men – the largest American mission band to set sail for Chinese shores.¹²⁰ Their departure needed to be arranged in haste. A history of misunderstandings between the Passionist missionaries in China and Bishop Ángel Diego y Carbajal, the vicar apostolic emeritus of Changde, China, convinced the order that they needed to establish their own apostolic prefecture in the country, thus enabling the missionaries to manage their own affairs.¹²¹ Enlarging the ranks of Passionists in China became a priority. Their departure was scheduled for June of 1924, allowing only nine months for Godfrey, Clement, and their fellow selectees to receive the requisite training and first-aid courses.¹²² Their ordination was expedited to meet the timetable.



Father Clement Seybold

Source: Passionist Historical Archives

The profound impact of Father Stanislaus Grennan's statements on martyrdom is evident in a letter that Godfrey Holbein sent to Provincial Justin Carey about receiving the necessary canon law dispensation for performing medical work in China. Even at this early stage, Godfrey anticipated a violent death in Christ's name:

Suppose we are killed when we get into China, and that, even soon after we arrive; can any grace be more desired; when shall we have a greater opportunity of giving such glory to God and of throwing luster on the Congregation? Are we going to deny Our Congregation martyrs and leave it only with confessors, simply because martyrdom means the loss of a few men?¹²³

On Sunday, October 28, 1923 at 8:00 A.M., Godfrey Holbein and Clement Seybold, along with six other selectees bound for China, were ordained by Bishop Hugh Boyle of Pittsburgh at St. Vincent Archabbey in Latrobe, Pennsylvania.¹²⁴ The departure of the "Lucky Thirteen" in May of 1924 was nothing short of grand: both the eastern St. Paul of the Cross Province and the western Holy Cross Province arranged a series of religious ceremonies that galvanized the public, gained support for the American mission effort, and heightened apostolic zeal for the newly ordained missionaries. Between May 18 and July 22, events honoring the Lucky Thirteen were held in at least ten cities, starting with Union City, New Jersey.¹²⁵

Again, both Father Godfrey and Father Clement heard comparisons between China missionary work and martyrdom. During a departure ceremony at Boston, Massachusetts, Father Stanislaus Grennan gave a powerful and stirring sermon. He prophetically declared to the new missionaries, “All of you are going to work in China, and some of you are going to be martyrs.” Father William Westhoven, a fellow confrere in the fourth band, recalled the statement sending a shock through him, bringing a profound realization of what lay ahead.¹²⁶

Father Godfrey and Father Clement Adapt to China

The fourth missionary band arrived on August 12, 1924, after a twenty-one day journey across the Pacific. Fathers Godfrey, Clement, and their fellow missionaries arrived in Shanghai, disembarked from the *S.S. President Wilson*, and took their first steps upon Chinese soil.¹²⁷ Upon reaching the main mission at Chenzhou, they learned the difficulties that their predecessors faced in establishing a Passionist presence in China. They looked upon these veterans with reverence.

As with Father Constantine, the new missionaries spent their first months at the main mission in Chenzhou engaged in language study. Father Anthony Maloney, a confrere of the fourth mission band, describes the experience:

Most of the daylight hours were taken up with the study of Chinese. . . . For the language study all we had was the small primers used by Chinese children. Our teacher, pagan and an opium smoker, knew no English. He would point to a Chinese character and utter a sound which we tried to imitate; if there was a drawing on the page we might guess the meaning of the sound. We learned most of our beginner’s Chinese from the children. We’d point to something and they’d give the name in Chinese. If our attempt at pronunciation was incorrect they let us know at once, particularly by loud laughter.¹²⁸

Both Fathers Clement and Godfrey found the routine tedious and longed to adopt Father Constantine’s approach – leave Chenzhou and learn in the field. Father Clement found Chinese challenging and compared it to a new philosophy, though he never mentioned it as a burden. He considered the linguistic structure “backwards” from Western languages. After five weeks in Chenzhou, he signed his letters home in English and Chinese. Before long Confrator Mark Seybold – the brother who followed Father Clement into the Passionist order – received summaries on Chinese language and culture with the intention of preparing him for work in the China mission fields.¹²⁹

In contrast, Father Godfrey experienced greater difficulty. Writing for *The Sign* in 1925, he describes himself “grappling with the barbaric language of Chinese.”¹³⁰ In a letter to his sister, Sister Mary Hildegard of the Sisters of Mercy in Baltimore, he confessed to having “blue moments” because everything was “so strange here.” He had difficulty acclimating to Chinese cuisine, stating that he had little appetite for the food and often forced himself to eat. An iron deficiency made him break out in boils and prevented

him from studying over the course of five months, which further hampered his progress.¹³¹ He begged his sister to “Pray! Pray! Pray!” for him. An inability to master the language would render him incapable of hearing confessions and performing pastoral duties in China.¹³²

In July 1925, both Fathers Clement and Godfrey received permission to minister in China.¹³³ Finally, at the beginning of August, Father Dominic Langenbacher, superior of the China missions, along with his mission council, decided that members of the fourth band were ready for the field. They assigned Father Clement Seybold to assist Father Quentin Olwell at Qianyang; Father Godfrey received an assignment to assist Father Flavian Mullins at Xupu.¹³⁴

The response of both priests to their assignments and their lives as missionaries reveal a great deal about their character. Unlike Father Constantine they wrote sparingly for *The Sign*, but penned copious letters home.¹³⁵ Their experience is easier to follow through personal correspondence.

By all accounts, Father Clement adapted quickly to missionary life. He felt safe in Qianyang. The mission had a thirty-foot wall complete with plated iron gates that were guarded by day and bolted at sunset. Frequently he referred to the mission compound as “the fort.” For Father Clement, an average day consisted of preparing a sermon in Chinese, dispensing medicine, feeding the poor, caring for orphans dropped off at the mission for adoption, enrolling Chinese children in school, explaining doctrine to catechumens, tending to a sick call, or balancing daily financial records.¹³⁶ On occasion he received visits from fellow missionaries suffering with bouts of illness. In early 1926 he nursed Father Quentin Olwell back to health from smallpox.¹³⁷

Father Clement managed the Qianyang mission in 1925, when Father Quentin departed to attend the installation of Father Dominic Langenbacher as prefect apostolic.¹³⁸ Father Clement embraced the opportunity: it permitted him to preach in Chinese earlier than he had expected.¹³⁹ By January 1926 he felt confident enough to regularly accept sole charge of the mission, permitting veteran missionaries more time for travel. Father Clement conveyed his sense of contentment to his brother Mark Seybold, stating that he was “alone, but not lonely; busy, but very happy.”¹⁴⁰

When writing home, Father Clement tended to focus on events unfolding around him. Bandits were a recurring theme. Ominous portents of the future arose in 1925, when Father Kevin Murray was held by bandits and again in 1926 with the dramatic capture and release of Father Ernest Cunningham.¹⁴¹ In both cases the bandits demanded ransom for their prisoners and the Passionists refused to provide it. A similar incident occurred to several Protestant men and women who were captured on their way from Hankou to Chenzhou.¹⁴² Father Clement perceived the logic of refusing to pay ransom and supported it: if the bandits received payment, they would make a regular and lucrative business out of kidnapping missionaries. Fortunately for Father Kevin and Father Ernest, the bandits released their captives after failing to acquire

ransom, though Father Kevin's brush with outlaws left him mentally unstrung, requiring rest in Hankou.¹⁴³

On July 16, 1926, Father Clement had a disconcerting encounter with soldiers turned bandits. While visiting the town of Hongjiang to buy rice, the soldiers he had hired for a military escort turned bandit, harassing his traveling party, robbing the boat, and looting the town. A rival army of troops from Guizhou Province engaged the soldier-bandits in a firefight, driving them off. The incident delayed Father Clement's return to Qianyang, unnerving the Passionists – the event happened at approximately the same time as Father Ernest's capture. Experiences such as these likely shaped Father Clement's opinion of the Chinese people. He once confessed to his brother that, while he liked the Chinese, he found that they could not always be trusted.¹⁴⁴

The missionaries weathered their first loss of a comrade with the death of Father Edmund Campbell, the Passionist procurator in Hankou, who suffered a heart attack. Father Clement noted the loss in a letter to his brother, but did not appear especially distressed. Death from natural causes was expected in China. The incident received more attention in the United States.¹⁴⁵ It also served as a grim reminder that the Passionists had committed themselves to China for life.

Father Clement's letters home and the air of serenity he projected for fellow missionaries indicated a soul unperturbed by the rigors of missionary life. However, Chinese Christians perceived that he cloaked the impact of hardships beneath a mantle of perpetual calm.

[One would think] because he knew no interior suffering that Father Clement could remain outwardly unperturbed amidst the countless cares of mission life. On the contrary, there is evidence at hand disclosing the fact that his soul had its many hours of darkness and aridity. Some of the more discerning of the Chinese Christians gave witness to this when they said, *Tatik'n ti shin ta teh ben* (His spirit of suffering was very great). He made big sacrifices with a smile and his crosses he bore in silence.¹⁴⁶

The Trials of Father Godfrey Holbein

In the kaleidoscope of mission experience, Father Clement demonstrates the story of a missionary who adapted quickly to China. Father Godfrey Holbein, on the other hand, reveals the story of a tenuous, struggling missionary. In the early years, he betrayed no hint of restlessness to superiors or fellow missionaries. Only letters home to Sister Hildegard Holbein convey his despair.

When they assigned him to the mission of Xupu, veteran missionaries assured Father Godfrey that he was selected for his "strong character." Yet, he confided to his sister a lack of confidence.¹⁴⁷ The mission at Xupu was a red brick chapel with a skylight and four rooms, and six "out missions" demanded additional travel and attention. A half million people lived in the region.¹⁴⁸ The missionaries were the only white men that they had ever seen.¹⁴⁹ Shortly after arrival in Xupu, Father Flavian assigned Father Godfrey to an out mission in Qiaojang. This meant that

he saw Father Flavian only twice a month when he returned to the main mission. His duties included managing a dispensary and keeping detailed financial records.¹⁵⁰ The solitude permitted him time for introspection that frequently gravitated toward an accounting of his perceived failures.

Still grappling with the language, Father Godfrey discovered that the citizens of Xupu spoke a different dialect than he'd learned at Chenzhou. The people understood him, but he found it exceedingly difficult to understand them. Frequently in delicate health, he took iron supplements, quinine, and strychnine provided by his sister, and ate eggs, fruits, and chickens received as payment for treating bandits in his dispensary.¹⁵¹

A Westerner struggling to acclimate, Father Godfrey developed a bleak opinion of Chinese culture. In December 1925, he candidly derided *Fan Jidu* – rice Christians – Chinese who studied doctrine if the Passionists fed and housed them during famines, but never attended church and had no genuine interest in converting to Christianity.¹⁵² In his view, making even one good Christian was an arduous process, more trying for the missionary than the prospective Christian.

Every one of our Fathers work themselves to the state of emaciation, and yet the results are so tiny. Many times we ask ourselves 'What is wrong with China or ourselves?' So many years and so few [C]hristians. May God convert this truly devil kingdom! Money, full stomach, opium, and big face is their only religion. As long as you give them rice and a bed they will come to Church.¹⁵³

Equally frustrating was the concept of maintaining "face" – prestige or honor – for himself and the mission.¹⁵⁴ Two incidents at Xupu bruised his confidence. In December of 1925 he received a sick call and catechism request for a Chinese woman 120 miles away who had a chapel in her home. Though overwhelmed by mission duties, he resolved to answer the call because the Passionists had purchased a large piece of property in her town. Chinese Christians employed at Xupu urged him not to go – most likely out of concern for his safety and health – but he subjected himself to a dangerous and enervating journey through bandit-ridden territory to uphold the honor of his mission. Interpreting their opposition as a lack of faith in his abilities, he felt deeply wounded. He confided to his sister:

I am awfully anxious for success, anxious to convert souls, to work with my whole soul, hungry for it, and when my little knowledge of the language, mentality and character of [*sic*] the [C]hinese ties my zeal I feel like an imprisoned criminal. Hence my desire and intention of leaving the mission ... you can't realize what a torture I suffer on account of my zeal.¹⁵⁵

Incidents at the dispensary discouraged him. In May 1926, he administered his first vaccination with trepidation. Running short on medications, he concluded that his patients required the skill of a surgeon, and when he refused to use a knife, he lamented that the mission "lost face."¹⁵⁶

Paradoxically, fellow missionaries had a positive impression of Father Godfrey and his work. In March of 1926, veteran missionary Father Flavian Mullins reported to Father Stanislaus Grennan:

He [Father Godfrey] is in fine health and doing good work. He also has a good fundamental knowledge of the language and it is improving every day ... best of all, he is grasping the Chinese mind and thus his work is much easier and more successful.¹⁵⁷

Father Flavian was not alone in his praise for Father Godfrey. In April 1926, Father Arthur Benson made a retreat to Xupu and commented that the junior missionary surprised him with his ability to handle the language so well when he preached the Sunday sermon.¹⁵⁸

Longing to return home, yet dissuaded by the necessity of getting permission from Apostolic Delegate Celso Costantini, religious Superior Dominic Langenbacher (now a monsignor), and Father Stanislaus Grennan, Father Godfrey felt trapped.¹⁵⁹ When political tensions escalated and anti-foreign sentiment gripped China in 1927, his thoughts gravitated again to martyrdom. Death presented an attractive option: first, it promised release from the rigors of mission life, and secondly, the story of a faithful missionary giving his life for Christ might kindle a desire in American Passionists to follow in his footsteps, sowing the seed for Chinese conversions.¹⁶⁰

Emergence of the United Front

At the same time that Fathers Godfrey and Clement were struggling to adapt to China, the country was in a state of foment. Coalitions of warlords vied for control of the country. At first, Guomindang leader Dr. Sun Yat-sen attempted to achieve national unity through the help of the warlords, but eventually concluded that success could never be achieved by depending upon such unstable elements. Meanwhile, the fledgling Communist Party under Mao Zedong, was struggling to enlarge its ranks. In 1923, it boasted only 432 members in the entire country.¹⁶¹

From afar, Josef Stalin, director of the Communist International (Comintern) in Moscow, observed the failure of both parties to unite China.¹⁶² Dr. Sun Yat-sen's movement enjoyed mass support, but suffered from weak organization. Mao Zedong's Communist Party, on the other hand, was well-organized. Stalin arrived at a novel conclusion: the two parties had to join forces and defeat the warlords. Stalin brokered the uneasy peace through Soviet Comintern agent Michael M. Borodin and Adolf Joffe, a diplomat internationally recognized for negotiating the Brest-Litovsk Nonaggression Treaty with Germany at the end of World War I.¹⁶³ The alliance formed between the Guomindang and Communists is known as the First United Front.¹⁶⁴ In the aftermath of Dr. Sun Yat-sen's death on March 12, 1925, the unstable coalition united under his closest ally, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. The following year, Chiang carried out Dr. Sun's long-postponed Northern Expedition, a campaign to conquer and defeat the warlords that plagued China.¹⁶⁵ Even as they fought side by side, both parties pursued their own interests. The Guomindang sought to restrain Communism within its merged ranks, while the Communists used the opportunity to spread their revolution deeper into China.

The Passionists Under the United Front

By early 1927, the Passionists noted a marked increase in Communist presence throughout western Hunan, along with a dramatic rise in anti-foreign sentiment.¹⁶⁶ Popular fury against foreigners had risen to a fever pitch after incidents in which British, French, and Portuguese forces fired upon Chinese students, cadets, and workers conducting demonstrations against their presence.¹⁶⁷

As the United Front drew closer, friends of the Passionists warned them of impending danger.¹⁶⁸ Communist leader Mao Zedong was visiting the Changsha region of Hunan, creating a blueprint for his rural revolution.

Agitators come to a town ... go about the streets preaching everywhere, enlisting the students in their crusade, brow beat every trade and every class of individuals of the town into a revolutionary society and then through these crush everything ... the machinery is especially directed against the Missions. "Children need not obey their parents, citizens their rulers, daughters-in-law their mothers." "Down with!" got to be the slogan for everything that stood for law and order. Down with the Catholics, Down with the Protestants, Down with the Foreigners. Down with the Military... In its wake (are) left deserted missions, desecrated churches, vacant schools, hospitals hovels of dust.¹⁶⁹

By January of 1927, American Vice-Consul John Carter Vincent in Changsha perceived that the Northern Expedition would make Hunan intolerable for Americans.¹⁷⁰ He ordered certain classes of missionaries to withdraw quietly from the province.

Exceptions may be made for those ... stationed in localities, withdrawal from which would mean more danger than remaining; for those who feel that they are in no danger and to whom withdrawal would bring undue financial hardship; and for those who are certain that the Chinese in their localities couldnot [*sic*] be excited by local or outside disturbances.¹⁷¹

Xupu, the mission of Fathers Godfrey and Flavian, was the first to be engulfed by the onslaught. An invasion army of Cantonese soldiers and two hundred Communist students swept the bandit pass behind the city and then flooded the streets. Fathers Godfrey and Flavian fled into the mountains for safety only with the clothes on their backs.¹⁷² Cities in the lower Yuan valley organized an evacuation convoy with strong military escort for departing missionaries. The two frantic Passionists joined the company, which took them as far as Changsha. There, Father Flavian met Vice-Consul John Carter Vincent himself, who urged them to go to Shanghai for safety.¹⁷³ Both priests delayed for a few days, awaiting news from Msgr. Dominic Langenbacher. By the end of February they were in Shanghai.

Meanwhile, Msgr. Dominic assessed the chaos brewing outside the windows of the main mission at Chenzhou and concluded that war was at hand. Father Terence Connolly suffered a nervous breakdown. Communist propagandists burst into the mission and

the priest fled in terror, screaming, “Chenzhoufu is hell!”¹⁷⁴ Xupu was overrun by Communists. In Chenxi, Father Cyprian Frank reported that a bullet had passed three feet in front of him and lodged in a wall.¹⁷⁵

Msgr. Dominic decided to order all Passionist missionaries to evacuate as quickly as possible to the neighboring province of Gizhou, where a progressive governor had blocked Communism by placing a strict guard on the borders.¹⁷⁶ His terse order sent to flight seven missionaries stationed in the northern half of the Passionist prefecture – most of which had not yet observed any activity in their own missions: Fathers Agatho Purtill, Raphael Vance, Theophane Maguire, Anthony Maloney, Terrence Connolly, Basil Bauer, and Constantine Leech.¹⁷⁷ The missionaries endured a grueling march that strained them to their mental and physical limits. Reduced to sustaining themselves upon rice, coarse tea, rotting vegetables, and bits of fly-specked meat, they suffered from bouts of dysentery. Inclement weather added to the misery: most of the journey found them soaked by unrelenting rain or blistered by a fierce Oriental sun. Father Constantine rejoiced in prolonged hiking and riding along perilous roads, but many of his confreres did not. The mules were unshod, and they grew tender-footed from the constant hard pace. The missionaries tried to spare them as best they could by increasing their periods of walking.¹⁷⁸ Trekking through territory wrecked by famine and bandits, they passed half-starved inhabitants living amid ruins and cities that were completely deserted.

Withered and gaunt, they stumbled into the city of Guiyang on May 21, 1927, where the Paris Foreign Mission Society received them hospitably.¹⁷⁹ Father Agatho was extremely ill, and Father Constantine remained at his side day and night, nursing him back to health.¹⁸⁰ Eventually they regrouped with Msgr. Dominic in Chongqing, and once again, Father Constantine worked tirelessly to heal another religious gripped by illness: Sister Clarissa Statmiller, a Sister of St. Joseph who worked alongside the Passionists in Hunan.¹⁸¹ To the great sorrow of the missionaries, she passed away from malaria on July 21.¹⁸² After her funeral, Fathers Constantine and Agatho followed Msgr. Dominic to Shanghai, where the Passionists would remain for five months.¹⁸³

Msgr. Dominic also sent evacuation orders to missions in the southern half of the prefecture. A postscript followed those orders, one that would create controversy for years to come. At most, he informed them, they could delay a little and wait for the arrival of the military.¹⁸⁴ At the mission in Yuanzhou, Fathers Timothy McDermott and Gregory McEttrick were living in peace. The same held true for Fathers Clement Seybold and Ernest Cunningham who were both in Qienyang. They accepted Msgr. Dominic’s postscript as a sign that they could exercise discretion. Moreover, they considered his decision to abandon Hunan a rash action, since they technically could not leave their prefecture without permission from Rome.¹⁸⁵

Father Clement wrote home, reporting that efforts to stir the population against the foreigners were unsuccessful. Even as violence escalated in larger cities and the American consul urged evacuation, Father Clement felt that leaving the missions was tantamount

to shirking duty, since the Christians needed spiritual guidance now more than ever. Aware of potential danger, his thoughts gravitated to the possibility of martyrdom:

All the trouble is due to the advance Southern army who are Bolsheviks and are known over here as ‘Reds’.... The poor Chinese deserve pity. They will soon learn to their sorrow that they ever started out with Russia. They will have to pay dearly. But wouldn’t it be great if we could die martyrs and go straight to Heaven! But I feel unworthy to ask for such an immense grace from God. However pray that His will be done.¹⁸⁶

Late February brought a rise in political tensions in Qianyang. On February 25, a proclamation was posted on the streets instructing Chinese citizens not to harm the foreigners and treat them with respect. The cauldron had begun to boil by April, when the Communists organized student demonstrations outside the mission, chanting propaganda that had already become familiar. Posters referred to the missionaries as “foreign dogs” and mission workers as “slaves of foreign dogs.” Students threw rocks at night, but the Catholic mission was protected by iron gates. Father Clement felt safe within “the fort.” Sympathetic Christians leaked plans for more violence, affording time for Father Quentin Olwell to request protection from military authorities. Soldiers from the neighboring province of Gizhou defended the missionaries in Qienyang and Yuanzhou until the political situation stabilized later that year. Father Clement and his fellow three missionaries in the south never did evacuate, and their decision to remain incited controversy that would sunder the Passionists in China.¹⁸⁷ By June 15, Father Clement reported to his family:

In the Ch’ien-yang [Qianyang] area Kweichow [Gizhou] soldiers and allies of Chiang-Kai-shih [*sic*] are beating and slaughtering the Reds everywhere. think that we shall soon be rid of Bolshevism, but it will be a long time before China gets back to norma[[]], if there ever was such a norm in China, for the Bolsheviks have sown their evil seed.¹⁸⁸

Unlike his confrere Father Clement Seybold, Father Godfrey considered the evacuation an appropriate response to the political chaos of 1927. The strain of events had taken their toll: in June he was beset by palsy, which made writing extremely difficult.¹⁸⁹ Despite lingering instability in the region, his fellow missionary Father Flavian returned to Hunan. Father Godfrey remained behind. Always praying for martyrdom, he wrote his sister:

[I]f our Fathers and Sisters are killed, I think I shall lose my mind. For while their death strictly speaking would not be martyrdom in the theological sense, still in the sight of God it would be.... Think of it, I have missed the one big opportunity[.] Pray that Our Lord’s holy Will be done.¹⁹⁰

It was plain to him that death resulting from political turmoil did not fit the strict definition of martyrdom, yet he felt that a death suffered in the line of religious duty still merited consideration. Father Godfrey remained in Shanghai and acted as chaplain to British soldiers until November 1927, when a cable summoned

him to return to ¹⁹¹ Chenzhou. At this point fellow missionary Father Terrence Connolly had returned to the States – even without seeking the necessary Provincial permission – and the depleted and harried Father Godfrey verged upon finally doing the same.¹⁹²

Reaction to 1927 Events

As missionary activity ground to a halt in western Hunan, Passionists and a broader Catholic audience were watching headlines on the chaos in China and awaiting word on the fate of missionaries scattered to the winds by political strife. Privy to information about the China missions, Father Stanislaus Grennan continued to promote his favorite cause. Like Father Godfrey, he also perceived that a death in the cause of Christ merited martyrdom. He circulated a letter addressed to all missionaries in China:

Whilst we sympathize with you, we envy you the opportunity of suffering something for Christ's sake. Your persecution is largely 'in odium Religionis,' and should some of you be put to death, you will win a martyr's crown, even as did the martyrs of the Boxer uprising, the Cause of whose Canonization has been introduced in Rome.¹⁹³

Americans, he assured the China missionaries, were aware of their sufferings. He ordered prayers and penances throughout the American province on their behalf. Using the same verve that kindled them during the departure ceremonies, he exhorted the exiles in China to put their trust in God. Unable to post personal articles from the missionaries, *The Sign* posted excerpts from the letters they sent back to the States.¹⁹⁴

Chiang Kai-shek's Northern Expedition put foreign interests in jeopardy, and for many months, his military movements along the Yangtze River created situations that placed China on the front page for Catholic and secular periodicals.¹⁹⁵ Friends and family of the missionaries, along with a larger Catholic audience aware of the China missions, absorbed news of the chaos and read about their persecution by Communists from afar. In Father Constantine's hometown of Pittsburgh, headlines from *The Pittsburgh Catholic* announced the exodus of missionaries in April. Readers learned their plight from headlines such as "China Missions Seized, Priests Forced to Flee"¹⁹⁶ and "Grave Fears Felt For Safety Of Pittsburgh Priests and Sisters Assigned to Interior of China; Passionist Fathers and St. Joseph Sisters Who Left Here Last August for China, Are In Flight For Their Lives."¹⁹⁷ Similar headlines flashed across the front page of *The Catholic Telegraph* in Cincinnati, where Passionists from the western Holy Cross Province followed their brethren, and the *Baltimore Catholic Review*, the local Catholic periodical of Father Godfrey's hometown. On May 14, the *Dunkirk Evening Observer*, the secular paper from Father Clement's hometown, reported the priest missing in action and mistakenly included him in the group of evacuees: "Dunkirk Priests Missing in China; Father Clement Seybold With Party of Missionaries in Hunan Who Fled From Looted Missions."¹⁹⁸ The June 15 issue included an article that reported him as safe.¹⁹⁹ During the crisis, it was common to see syndicated stories gleaned from the wires of the National Catholic News Service or the Associated Press. Thus, news coverage of foreign missionaries was as familiar to American readers as battles with the Ku Klux Klan, visits by bishops, outings

by the Knights of Columbus, and promotion of Catholic truths. Events occurring with the Passionists in China had reached the mainstream consciousness of American Catholics.

Disunion After the United Front

In the aftermath of the 1927 exodus from Hunan, the Passionists, like China, were bitterly divided. The missionaries who obeyed Msgr. Dominic's order to evacuate returned to find lapsed Chinese Catholics who had succumbed to the fury of Communist propaganda and abandoned religious practices. During their absence, churches, mission houses, and catechumenates had been wrecked. Missionaries who defied the order and remained at their missions enjoyed full churches and catechumenates. For them, progress had continued without disruption. Adding salt to the wound, Apostolic Delegate Celso Costantini supported their decision to remain at home.²⁰⁰

Passionist superiors in the United States detected the deep division in Hunan. Father Stanislaus Grennan swiftly convened a council, resulting in a decision to send Father Sebastian Ochsenreiter to China. He granted Father Sebastian authority to hear the grievances of Passionists in Hunan, evaluate progress at each mission, and recommend actions to restore unity.²⁰¹

The trip lasted between June 1 and November 15, 1928. His visit with Father Constantine occurred in Longshan on August 26, shortly after the priest sauntered in fresh from a 125-mile mule ride.²⁰² He called on Father Clement at Yuanzhou on September 20.²⁰³ While both men struck him as laconic, and Father Clement appeared thin and older than his years suggested, he found them both contented, capable missionaries.

By the time of Father Sebastian's visit, Father Godfrey's angst reached its nadir. The previous fall Father Godfrey had sent a letter to Father Stanislaus Grennan and admitted to suffering a nervous breakdown. At last, in 1928, he requested to come home, stating the disunion of his brethren as the source of restlessness.²⁰⁴ In light of this, Father Sebastian's observations of Father Godfrey are of particular interest. His personal notes include the following statement:

Father Godfrey's health is not good. He told me he had wrote [*sic*] to your Paternity some time ago, and asked to be allowed to come home, on account of his nervous condition. He describes his condition by saying he is always in mortal dread of something going to happen to him. Not bandits or anything big, but some indefinable something is always hanging over his head.... I feel the superiors at home considering Father Godfrey's honest disposition would act unwisely, if they refused or showed any hesitation in cheerfully granting the request, should it be made, that he return to America.²⁰⁵

Father Stanislaus swiftly sent a letter to Msgr. Dominic allowing permission for Father Godfrey's return, concluding that he would rather have only a few missionaries in the field who were zealous, obedient, docile, and charitable, than a large number of malcontents lacking in those virtues.²⁰⁶ Once again, the monsignor

exhibited an inability to act decisively. He responded to Father Godfrey's crisis by attempting to rekindle his interest in China, and at the same time, giving consent to leave.²⁰⁷ Piety outweighed common sense. Msgr. Dominic did not enforce the decision for the anxious missionary to return home, and Father Godfrey, leaving the decision in his hands out of obedience, remained in China. This paralysis amid monumental decisions riled fellow missionaries. After Father Sebastian confronted him over the matter, the monsignor submitted his resignation as superior of the China missions.²⁰⁸

While Father Godfrey spent the last months of his life vacillating between renewed optimism and melancholy, one of his final letters demonstrates his despair toward the end:

[Do you think it] strange, that I should feel so much out of place after [sic] being here almost five years? If I could put my whole heart into the work. Not only does this discontent frighten me; but what is worse, my life has become so hopeless and wearisome, that not only my missionary, priestly and religious vocation; but even my faith seems wavering. You have no idea what it is like to live in a country where God is unknown ... devil worship and materialism.... Remaining here seems hopeless and leaving here seems as devoid of hope.²⁰⁹

Aside from evaluating the Passionists in Hunan and resolving their strife, one of Father Sebastian's duties in China involved welcoming a sixth band of Passionist missionaries who had just arrived in Hankou.²¹⁰ The three new selectees hailed from the western Holy Cross Province in America. The last was Father Walter Coveyou.²¹¹

Part IV:

Fourth Martyr in Desire: Father Walter Coveyou

Father Walter Coveyou yearned to be a China missionary from the beginning. Ordained to the priesthood on May 29, 1920, Father Walter learned that the Passionists of St. Paul of the Cross Province intended to send a band of missionaries to the pagan land and volunteered at once. However, his heart's desire would remain unfulfilled until 1928. He belonged to the Holy Cross Province west of the Ohio River, and in the early 1920s his superiors were not yet prepared to contribute missionaries. Instead of supporting the Passionists within China, Father Walter devoted his energy to supporting their cause in the American heartland. Thus, in the kaleidoscope of American mission experience, Father Walter conveys the story of the "homefront missionary." Short in stature, he stood only 5'3½", but he was a dynamic man with hazel eyes and dark brown hair that had thinned by the time he departed for China at age thirty-four.²¹²

Walter Vincent Coveyou was born at Petoskey, Michigan on October 17, 1894.²¹³ He was the fifth of eight children, and his parents, William M. Coveyou and Flora Draper, were pioneers of the region.²¹⁴ Friends and family described him as a "loveable, good-natured, optimistic lad." The Coveyous lived in an area with a long and rich Catholic history, and the members of the devout family were all well-known, active members of their parish, St. Francis Xavier.²¹⁵



Father Walter Coveyou

Source: Passionist Historical Archives

St. Francis was a Franciscan church. Unlike Fathers Constantine Leech, Clement Seybold, and Godfrey Holbein, all of whom grew up in parishes operated by the Passionists, Walter learned of the congregation by coincidence. While visiting his cousin Ms. Seneca Coveyou in Saint Ignace, Michigan, he attended a parish mission conducted by Passionist Father Henry Miller and during a sermon, he heard his call to join the priesthood.²¹⁶ Walter entered the Passionist Preparatory School in Cincinnati, Ohio, at Holy Cross Monastery, Mt. Adams, on July 1, 1910. On February 13, 1912, when he professed as a Passionist, he adopted his baptismal name "Walter" as his religious one.²¹⁷ His studies would take him to Sacred Heart Retreat House in Louisville, Immaculate Conception Monastery in Chicago, and Mother of Good Counsel Monastery in Normandy, Missouri outside St. Louis.²¹⁸ On May 29, 1920, at Holy Name Cathedral, he was ordained by Archbishop George Mundelein of Chicago.²¹⁹

After being rejected for the China mission in 1920, Father Walter worked in Cincinnati, where he became a charismatic preacher who frequently promoted the cause of foreign missionary work. In the process, he brought the mission experience to church pews, clubs, and sodalities, and reinforced the awareness of missionary activity already planted in mainstream consciousness by periodicals of the day. Catholic life in Cincinnati was vibrant. People throughout the city participated in Passionist-sponsored devotions.²²⁰ This afforded Father Walter ample opportunity to make connections and advocate on behalf of his brethren in the Far East.

For six years he stunted neither time nor energy to aid in a financial way the missions he longed to serve in person. He organized and directed various social activities for the raising of funds for the missions. His willingness to do more than his share of the work, his jovial disposition that won him countless friends among the clergy and the laity, the ability to smooth over the difficulties connected with the work, crowned his efforts in this regard with incredible success. No Catholic charity of its kind could compete with the returns he secured.²²¹

Also during this time period, Cincinnati served as home base for the Catholic Student Mission Crusade (CSMC), which sought to promote mission education in schools affiliated with the organization. It capitalized on local involvement in Catholic parishes and schools in order to foster international mission awareness, and served as a pillar of home support for foreign missions.²²² Father Walter was a member of the CSMC education committee, representing the Passionists.²²³

As a reader of the Cincinnati-based *Catholic Telegraph*, Father Walter likely noted headlines such as, “Newly Ordained Priest is Assigned to China” – an article on Father Godfrey Holbein – and “U.S. Demands Protection For Passionists in China,” which described Chinese troops firing upon two missionaries and shooting at the American flag.²²⁴ Headlines announcing the departure of the “Lucky Thirteen” likely struck him as bittersweet. The fourth mission band had included the first selectees from Holy Cross Province. Once again, Father Walter had eagerly volunteered for China, and once again, he had been denied.

I thought for a while that I had a chance of going to China. The Provincial asked for volunteers but of the many who offered themselves only four were chosen, I was one of the disappointed ones but I’m on the list and have hopes of getting there some day.... There is talk of keeping me at this [fundraising] work instead of letting me go to China. But who knows.²²⁵

Beatrice Henshaw, niece of Father Walter, always remembered him as a jovial, sensitive, and idealistic person – all qualities that made him successful at fundraising in Cincinnati.²²⁶

In 1926, Father Walter had a change in venue: he transferred to the Immaculate Conception Monastery in Chicago to promote *The Sign* and manage circulation of the magazine in the western province.²²⁷ Previously, he had supported foreign missionary work in general. This sharpened his focus to promoting the Passionist cause in China – the very mission field he ached to serve himself. He continued efforts to support the Catholic Student Mission Crusade from his new home base.²²⁸

Father Walter’s fortunes changed in April 1927. That month, during a meeting of the Elder Council of the Knights of Columbus, Father John Hickey announced that Father Walter’s long-desired wish to join his fellow Passionists as a missionary in China would soon become reality.²²⁹ Father Walter received a standing ovation from the ebullient crowd. He was set to join the sixth

mission band to Hunan, departing in September 1928.

Anticipation built throughout the spring and summer of 1928. At the same time that Father Sebastian Ochsenreiter sought to analyze and heal the strife that divided Passionist missionaries in Hunan, Father Walter, along with fellow selectees Father Francis Flaherty and Father Nicholas Schneiders, attended medical courses at Georgetown University. That year, training of missionaries had been lengthened from two weeks to six. With a class of thirty-two students representing nine different religious orders, the 1928 class was the largest to attend the course.²³⁰ As a demonstration of homefront support, on June 23, Father Walter’s supporters in Mt. Adams, Cincinnati, held a card party to raise funds and defray the cost of sending his mission band to China in September.²³¹

In the September 6, 1928 issue of *The Catholic Telegraph*, the periodical where Father Walter had followed the departure of five other Passionist mission bands to China, at last he could read headlines announcing his own. “Three Priests To Leave for China Missions Sunday” graced the cover.²³² Also making the cover, an article about Father Walter himself: “Popular Priest Going to China.”²³³ A legion of supporters and Passionists from Cincinnati to Chicago knew that his departure was a loss to financial aid efforts on the home front, yet they rejoiced with him, knowing that his dream of becoming a missionary was finally being fulfilled.

On September 21, 1928, the *S.S. President Polk* carried the sixth mission band to Chinese shores.²³⁴ At last, on November 19, Father Walter reached the main mission of Chenzhou.²³⁵ Mid-February 1929 found him immersed in Chinese language study. Frequently working from morning to midnight, pausing only for religious duties and meals, he concluded that the devil must have invented the language. In letters home, he reported that he’d succeeded in learning about 300 words or characters.²³⁶ The vast change in environment, coupled with an intense study schedule, brought on an attack of shingles.

Though bedridden by the affliction from March 9 to 21, fellow missionaries found him cheerful and ready to engage in conversation.²³⁷ His lighthearted nature buoyed Passionists who visited Chenzhou to meet the new arrivals. In his resilient cheer, they saw enormous potential and an ability to withstand the vicissitudes of missionary work.²³⁸ A letter reveals Father Walter’s hope for the life that awaited him:

I have come to the rainbow’s end, and if there be here a pot of gold it surely is mixed with a lot of dross. Underneath the dirt there is something more precious than gold—treasures bought by the sufferings and death of Our Lord: treasures that can be salvaged for the Kingdom of Heaven only by the sacrifices of missionaries at home and abroad. This surely is a great field. The work is slow and discouragement is what all seem to experience sometime or other. Pray for us and for our work.²³⁹

Part V: The Fateful Month of April 1929

During his visit to China, Father Sebastian Ochsenreiter observed

that missionaries in the northern and southern parts of the Passionist prefecture were estranged because they had never become acquainted. He proposed a series of retreats at the main mission in Chenzhou. Gradually over time, each missionary would meet all of his brethren, fostering the unity that had eluded them.²⁴⁰

The Passionists instituted this new rule in April 1929. On Sunday, April 7, eighteen missionaries gathered at Chenzhou, including Fathers Clement Seybold and Godfrey Holbein. As new arrivals, Father Walter and his confreres from the sixth band were concluding language studies at Chenzhou, and thus they attended as well.²⁴¹

The event mixed retreat conferences with free time for acquaintance. The gathering conducted several orders of business, including the announcement of a new division of authority. Msgr. Dominic resigned as superior of the China missions, but would continue fulfilling the role of prefect apostolic. Father William Westhoven assumed the role of mission superior. As his first act, he declared furlough mandatory for all missionaries and permitted Fathers Raphael Vance and Timothy McDermott several months' leave for rest in the United States. He also permitted Father Quentin Olwell to visit Shanghai for medical attention. Their departure temporarily left several missions unstaffed, which necessitated transfers of other missionaries to take their place. His list of new assignments included the following:

- Father Clement Seybold, Yuanzhou, missionary in charge
- Father Godfrey Holbein, Qianyang, missionary in charge
- Father Walter Coveyou, Qianyang, assistant.²⁴²

On Friday, April 19, the retreat ended and several Passionists departed for their missions, including Father Clement. Still recovering from shingles, Father Walter postponed his departure and Father Godfrey remained with him.²⁴³ Father Godfrey's obsession with martyrdom surfaced again during the retreat. He spoke of death during the gathering. Upon departing the mission with Father Walter on April 22, he told his compatriots at Chenzhou that he did not expect to see them again.²⁴⁴

Father Constantine Falls Ill

On Friday, April 19, 1929, Father Constantine awoke at his mission in Longshan feeling ill.²⁴⁵ He ate very little for breakfast that day and was unable to retain it. At first, he attributed the lack of vitality to stress – the burdens of mission life, coupled with the death of his mother, Mary A. Leech, on January 2, 1929.²⁴⁶ He expected to awake the following morning feeling refreshed, but instead felt worse. After Mass he returned to bed. Mulling over medical training attained in the States, he assessed his symptoms – vomiting, intestinal cramps, fever, diarrhea – and arrived at a possible diagnosis: cholera. The disease is often transmitted through ground water infected by runoff from a public toilet, so despite his thirst, he abstained from drinking more.²⁴⁷

Father Constantine may have been haunted by a premonition that this illness would take his life, for the easygoing John Wayne character did something he had rarely done before: he immediately made arrangements to leave for Yongshun (the nearest mission managed by Father Agatho Purtill) on the following day after

Mass to seek medical attention. When Sunday morning dawned, his condition had deteriorated even further: he could scarcely stand, nor could he keep down a cup of tea. It was the first time since ordination that sickness prevented him from saying Mass. Too ill to travel by mule, he departed from the mission on a sedan chair. The coolies carried him down winding stone stairs carved from the steep cliffs of Longshan. Burning with fever, scorched by thirst, and wracked by excruciating headaches, he endured the agony of being jostled about as the coolies negotiated their way down the cold, slippery stairs.

The Fateful Journey of Fathers Godfrey Holbein, Clement Seybold, and Walter Coveyou

On the evening of Monday, April 22, as Father Constantine endured an agonizing trek to Yongshun, Fathers Walter and Godfrey departed from the main mission in Chenzhou and arrived in Chenxi, a riverside town with thronging streets, bustling boatmen, and sharp, eager tradesmen. It was also the location of a mission run by Father Anthony Maloney.²⁴⁸ They caught up with Father Clement Seybold and five other Passionists on route to their missions, making an unplanned gathering of nine priests. The uncertainty of the roads beyond Chenxi had given them pause, and they hoped to collect information before moving on. Father Clement was headed for the mission in Yuanzhou. Fathers Godfrey and Walter were traveling to the mission at Qianyang. Both lay southwest of Chenxi. The three priests decided to travel together.

After supper, Father Anthony gathered intelligence from police and merchants on the road. After assessing bandit activity, the three missionaries chose to head south by mule toward Huaihua, where they would find an encampment of soldiers and obtain a military escort. The trip required at least two days of travel, and thus they would need a safe haven where they could spend the night. They judged Huajiao to be an ideal stopover.²⁴⁹ Their trip coincided with the village market day, when locals bustled about, buying wares from farmers. Bandits usually remained hidden during market days for fear of being observed, identified, and reported to police.

Their plans made, Father Godfrey and Father Clement stayed up late, singing and chatting with their brethren, discussing the future. The rigors of life in China made large gatherings rare, so they enjoyed each other's company to the fullest. Aware that Father Walter was both new to missionary life and recovering from illness, Father Godfrey prevailed upon him to retire early. After the crowd dispersed, Father Godfrey departed to the chapel and conducted a daily ritual of meditating upon the Stations of the Cross.²⁵⁰ Noting his exhaustion, one of the fathers begged him to go to bed and rest, but Father Godfrey insisted, "I have to make the stations."²⁵¹ Upon reflection, Father Francis Flaherty interpreted this as a sign that he expected to die.²⁵²

Father Anthony roused Fathers Godfrey, Clement, and Walter at 3:00 A.M. on Tuesday, April 23. The three priests said an early Mass and hastened through breakfast while Father Anthony organized the travel party: head porter Mr. Su Pisen; five carriers for baggage; Mr. Liao, a Qianyang horseman; Chenxi horseman Mr. Shia; two Mass servers "Peter" Hwang Tien I (Father Godfrey's

acolyte) and Wang Cosmas (Father Clement's acolyte); and a seminarian named "Paul" Zhou Ping Yen.²⁵³ Following his premonition of death, Father Godfrey went to confession before embarking on the day's journey. The convoy of fourteen departed at 6:00 A.M.²⁵⁴

At 4:00 P.M. the party arrived at Huajiao, a cluster of sixty-five houses nestled in the rolling countryside. They sought refuge at the inn, a farm house converted into a lodge. The business was managed by a Madame Nie, who bemoaned that her husband Laoban – "Old Board," as she called him – was never around when needed.²⁵⁵ She ordered servant boys to bring basins of water and towels for the guests, then proceeded to make dinner arrangements for them.²⁵⁶

All appeared well until 10:00 P.M., when Madame Nie busied herself with accounts and asked the priests to settle their bills for food and lodging. Immediately after receiving the money, she suggested that they leave at once because bandits were coming. Bewildered, the priests refused to leave; Mr. Su Pisen, the head porter, demanded to know why she would make such a statement. Madame Nie retracted her alarming remarks and offered no explanation.²⁵⁷

Shortly after the suspicious exchange, two armed men entered the inn and ordered the Passionist fathers and their party to identify themselves. This also was a customary practice in China when foreigners stayed at a Chinese village protected by a Home Guard. The armed men conducted a cursory examination of their luggage and inquired about their travel plans. After the priests calmly answered each question, they departed. The fathers asked Madame Nie who the men were. "They belong to the Home Guard," she informed them. Her answer dispelled their fears for the moment.²⁵⁸ Investigators later concluded that Madame Nie had lied. The armed men were Chinese partisans and their leader, Captain Nie Lien Chang, was a member of her family.²⁵⁹

One hour later at 11:00 P.M., their suspicions were aroused again when they heard two gunshots being fired into the night. The priests, two of their carriers, and the three Chinese boys leapt to their feet, thoroughly alarmed. Madame Nie once again attempted to allay their fears, telling the party that the gunshots were a *fang sao* – signal of safety – by the Home Guard. In reality, the shots were a signal beckoning to bandits lurking in the area.²⁶⁰

Her explanation failed to assure Fathers Clement and Godfrey, the seasoned missionaries of the band. The party was apprehensive. Speaking in a gentle, but clear voice, Father Godfrey warned her that, if foreigners came to harm in her house, her family and the people of Huajiao would suffer as a result. Treaties between the U.S. and China charged Chinese officials with the protection of American lives.²⁶¹ Madame Nie fled into the night and returned with her husband. Fathers Clement and Godfrey implored the Nies to call the Home Guard for their protection. The innkeeper and his wife refused several times, but at last consented when the priests offered to send Peter, Father Godfrey's Chinese Mass server, to the chief of the Home Guard to present their name cards. The effort proved futile. When the boy knocked upon the door of the chief's residence, members of the household claimed that he

was not at home. The chief had refused to assist. He knew what the bandits intended and feared the repercussions of interfering with their plans.²⁶²

Fathers Clement and Godfrey perceived that they had fallen into a trap. Bandits lurked outside, making escape impossible. They hoped to slip out of town in the gray morning hours and make haste for Huaihua, where they could secure a military escort.²⁶³

The Deaths of Fathers Godfrey Holbein, Clement Seybold, and Walter Coveyou

At first light on Wednesday, April 24 – the fourth day of the fourth week of the fourth month – the ill-fated party made a stealthy departure from the inn at Huajiao. Hoping to evade the bandits who hunted them, the convoy made its way along paths that twisted around hilly terrain. They had barely traveled one *li* (one-third of a mile) before a sharp voice ordered them to halt. A gang of sixteen or seventeen armed men emerged from a grassy bend in the road ahead. They threatened to shoot if the fathers moved an inch.

Father Walter was a novice in Chinese, and despite his years in China, Father Godfrey remained uncomfortable with the language. Father Clement spoke for the missionaries. Ever serene, even in the darkest of circumstances, he approached the bandits, requested the name of their honorable commander, and suggested that they lead the convoy to him. The bandits identified themselves as the men of Captain Nie Lian Chang.²⁶⁴

After conducting a thorough examination of the priests' baggage, the bandits began leading the group in haste along a path far from the road, weaving through open fields, steep mountains, and ominous stretches of brushland spiked with thorns. The journey was arduous. Captain Nie's men flogged the Chinese carriers and Christian boys with sticks and beat them with the butt ends of their rifles. Unnerved by the hostility of these men and shaken by a conviction that his life would end in violence, Father Godfrey sensed that his hour of martyrdom had come. He recited a rosary in preparation.²⁶⁵ During an ascent up a rugged mountain, when the way became so steep that the priests were forced to dismount from their mules, he gently instructed the Christian boys to make an act of perfect contrition and say an Our Father and a Hail Mary.²⁶⁶ A bandit moved to silence them, but Father Clement's mule intervened, kicking the man in the face with its hind hooves. Father Godfrey seized the opportunity to absolve the boys of their sins.²⁶⁷

After a grueling march of about five miles, the bandits drove their captives to an unplanted rice field with a spring of refreshing mountain water.²⁶⁸ They permitted the Chinese carriers to drink their fill, but forbade the three missionaries and Christian boys from quenching their thirst. Thoroughly parched, the priests and their followers could only stare at the cool stream with longing. The mules were tied, and over the course of a half hour, the bandits rummaged through their belongings a second time.

Finally, prodding Fathers Clement, Godfrey, and Walter at gunpoint, the bandits clambered up to a high plateau surrounded on

three sides by higher hills. Peter and Cosmas, the Mass servers, followed on their own volition. Once the procession reached the plateau, the bandits demanded that the three Passionists remove their clothes. Father Clement divined their intentions: they wanted to see if the priests were armed. He assured them that they were merely propagators of religion, and did not carry guns or ammunition. The bandits refused to take his word, however, and the missionaries began removing their shirts, trousers, socks, and shoes as ordered.

At this moment the bandit commander, Captain Nie Lian Chang, emerged to observe the priests. He was a diminutive man with a long scar that trailed along the right side of his face down to the back of his ear – evidently, the remains of a sword wound. Watching Father Clement remove his riding shirt, he caught sight of a round dollar tumbling from his pocket. Snatching up the coin, he turned to Father Walter and asked if he, too, had money, making a gesture with his thumb and forefinger indicating coinage. Unfamiliar with the Chinese words, Father Walter frowned in confusion. He was further bewildered by the man speaking a dialect used only by natives of Huajiao. He answered honestly, “*Budong* – I don’t understand.”

Captain Nie drew out a *Maqiang* – horse pistol – an automatic weapon used by the Chinese military.²⁶⁹ Father Anthony Maloney’s account in *The Sign* describes what occurred next:²⁷⁰

Hardly had Father Walter uttered these words than the same bandit [Captain Nie Lian Chang] fired a shot right through his head, entering on the left side of the face and coming out of the opposite side in the back of the head. His body fell heavily in the tall grass. Death must have been instantaneous. Father Clement, meanwhile, was in a stooped position, as if in the act of removing his shoes when the bandit came behind him and shot him.... Father Clement’s forehead was found to be split open, the tearing exit of the bullet making a large fissure.

In the meantime the boy Hwang Tien I (Peter) noticed Father Godfrey’s hand raised, as it were, in form for Absolution the while he wept bitterly at the sight of the two mangled bodies of his fellow priests. Father Godfrey’s own turn came quickly. Two shots were fired in quick succession at him. The boy Peter says that after Father Clement’s body fell to the ground he had become so disturbed in mind that he could recall only that the shots were directed at Father Godfrey. He did not dare look to see Father Godfrey’s body fall. This Peter was most devoted to Father Godfrey, having been his altar-boy and servant for more than a year.²⁷¹

As the echo of gunshots faded into silence, the bandits blew a bugle. It was a signal: the murders they had set out to perform were complete. Stunned by the traumatic scene they had just witnessed, the Christian boys were bound by one hand and dragged on another hike. The carriers gathered up the missionaries’ luggage – now ill-gotten bounty – and at the behest of their captors they hauled it three miles to the temple of Chang Kuang Miao in the

village of Ngan Shang. The bandits released the carriers, but the men refused to leave until they also liberated the two Mass servers. At first, the bandits refused to set the boys free until they paid ransom – one hundred dollars each. The carriers pled for their lives, arguing that the boys received only a few dollars as salary for assisting during Mass. After making the boys promise that they would not work for “foreign devils” and be “slaves of foreigners” – phrases commonly used by Chinese Bolsheviks – Captain Nie and his men released the boys at 5:30 P.M.²⁷²

The instant they escaped captivity in Ngan Shang, the boys and the carriers made plans to inform the Passionists of the day’s horrors. Cosmas, Father Clement’s Mass server, and Zhou Paul, the seminarian, fled at once to Father Timothy McDermott’s mission in Yuanzhou. Meanwhile carrier Su Pisen and Peter, Father Godfrey’s Mass server, headed back to Chenxi to inform Father Anthony Maloney of the tragedy.²⁷³

Recovery of the Remains

News of the murders first reached Chenxi at 3:30 P.M. on Thursday, April 25. Carrier Su Pisen stumbled into the mission and spilled out the story in a torrent of grief. Peter arrived an hour later. Beside themselves with sorrow, the Chenxi priests sent telegrams to all missions. Official letters were written to the Magistrate of Chenxi and the chief military officer. That night, sixty soldiers from the Chenxi Home Guard marched on Huajiao.²⁷⁴

The grim task of recovering the murdered Passionists fell upon Fathers Anthony Maloney and Miles McEtrick. They departed Chenxi at dawn on Friday, April 26. An armed escort of ninety soldiers accompanied them. By nightfall the search party succeeded in locating the execution site. Quickly they surmised why the bandits had marched their victims to this desolate location: at the rear of the clearing, searchers discovered an abandoned copper mine shaft – the ideal place to conceal murder victims. The pit stretched a mere three feet in diameter and ran 60 feet deep. The depth prevented them from getting a clear view of the bottom, but without question, they had found their murdered brethren. Blood stained the mouth of the pit. A bush sagged beneath the weight of human brain fragments.

For a few dollars, two men of Huajiao agreed to descend into the pit. The following morning, Saturday, April 27, they descended via ropes and extracted the remains of the murdered priests one by one – first Father Clement, then Father Godfrey, and at last Father Walter. The bodies had swollen in the water that pooled at the bottom of the pit, and wounds marred their flesh. The search party deduced that the bandits had used pikes or swords to thrust their victims into the mine shaft. By 3:00 P.M. that afternoon, the recovered bodies were wrapped in blankets and carried down the hill on bamboo poles. Soldiers called upon carpenters and ordered them to prepare caskets for the dead. Wood was apparently in short supply, for the soldiers stripped siding from local houses to acquire the necessary materials.²⁷⁵

Father Anthony and Father Miles accompanied the coffins of their murdered brethren during a sampan ride down the Yuan River. At the day’s end, they staggered into the mission at Chenxi.

The next day they would deliver the coffins to the main mission at Chenzhou. Depleted by horror and grief, they plucked up a telegram that had arrived during their absence. The two exhausted missionaries squinted at a line of text. They recoiled, as if physically struck, and shared a stare of disbelief. Their shoulders slumped in devastation. The telegram read:

**FATHER CONSTANTINE LEECH DIED
TODAY AT YUNGSHUN [YONGSHUN].²⁷⁶**

The Death of Father Constantine

Father Constantine had arrived in Yongshun at 2:00 P.M. on Tuesday, April 23, just as Fathers Godfrey, Clement, and Walter set out from Chenxi.²⁷⁷ The main priest of the Yongshun mission, Father Agatho Purtill, was absent. He had attended the recent retreat at the central mission in Chenzhou, and eventually arrived four hours later at 6:00 P.M.²⁷⁸ Father Caspar Conley managed the mission in his absence. As soon as coolies set Father Constantine's chair upon the ground, Father Caspar scrambled to make the dying missionary as comfortable as possible. At first Father Constantine staunchly refused to deprive one of his brethren of a bed and demanded to use a simple folding cot. He finally capitulated – only after being asked to do so as a favor – and accepted the bed of a local priest.

A few hours of rest seemed to restore Father Constantine's strength, but in the early hours of Wednesday, April 24, just as Fathers Godfrey, Clement, and Walter were embarking upon their ill-fated journey from the inn at Huajiao, Father Constantine awoke in a state of agitation, pleaded for Father Agatho, and insisted upon going to confession.²⁷⁹ He feared he was losing his mind. At times he was certain that death was imminent. Sickness had stripped away the joyful nonchalance that characterized him in the eyes of fellow Passionists. Puzzled by his symptoms, Fathers Agatho and Caspar struggled to give him peace by accepting his original diagnosis of cholera and applying the necessary remedies. A Chinese boy devoted to the ailing missionary offered to watch him. After an hour or two, he fell back into a restless sleep.

The morning brought a welcome change in Father Constantine. At breakfast, he ate milk toast and tea with delight – a sign that encouraged Fathers Caspar and Agatho – and he managed to retain it. As the afternoon wore on, Father Constantine considered leaving for Chenzhou in a few days. He hoped to participate in a retreat scheduled for missionaries who had been unable to attend the first one. The murders of Fathers Godfrey, Clement, and Walter had occurred by this point, but the Passionists had yet to receive news of it.

The positive change in Father Constantine was short-lived. By Wednesday evening his temperature shot up to a raging 105°. The Chinese boy held vigil by his bedside. Once again, at 1:30 A.M. on Thursday, Father Constantine shook awake and pleaded for Father Agatho. By the time that the priest rushed into the room, Father Constantine's mind had slid into delirium. Father Caspar hastened to the church, returned with holy oils, and Father Agatho proceeded to give their dying comrade last rites. His high fever, hazy

mental state, twitching hands, and bouts of intense anxiety compelled them to arrive at a new diagnosis for their patient: typhoid fever.²⁸⁰ The realization grieved them, for they lacked the proper remedies at Yongshun to treat his disease. It was impossible to get so much as a piece of ice to reduce his fever. Powerless to alleviate his suffering, they held vigil at his bedside, pondered reflections of Christ's Passion in his ashen, wincing face, and waited for the end.

About 1:30 A.M. on Friday – Father Constantine's favorite day of the week – his restlessness ceased and he began breathing regularly and quietly.²⁸¹ Fathers Agatho and Caspar brightened in hope that the disease was finally relenting. However, at 2:00 A.M., Father Constantine released a faint sigh and his head dropped slightly to the side. In desperation, the two priests administered CPR and rubbed his extremities to restore blood flow, but to no avail. He had passed away.

Fathers Agatho and Caspar clothed him in the Passionist habit, gently wrapped a stole around his neck, and eased a crucifix into his hand. On Saturday, April 27, Father Agatho bore his remains to the central mission in Chenzhou.²⁸² That same evening, a runner from a nearby mission arrived breathless at Yongshun, and revealed the capture and murder of Fathers Godfrey, Clement, and Walter to Father Caspar. Yongshun lacked a telegraph connection, and thus Father Caspar was among the last to learn of the Passionists' catastrophic loss. Like his brethren, he was devastated.

Part VI: Conclusion

Father Constantine's casket arrived in Chenzhou on Monday, April 29.²⁸³ Over six days, four coffins lay in state in St. Augustine Church at Chenzhou.²⁸⁴ On Saturday, May 4, as a white Oriental sun cast penetrating rays over the winding streets and mud-tiled rooftops of the ancient city, a funeral cortege emerged from the Catholic Mission. The inhabitants of Chenzhou had never seen such a large procession. Chinese Catholics near and far had gathered to mourn the fallen priests. Along with Chinese aspirants to the priesthood, orphans from the mission school and infants from the nursery accompanied the Passionists and their mission staff.²⁸⁵ In addition, the procession included nuns from America who had joined the Passionists in their efforts to convert pagan China. The sudden deaths sobered the missionaries. As they carried their brethren to their final resting place, they realized that moving forward demanded an end to the disunion that had plagued them. Grief had forever united them.²⁸⁶

News of the deaths swiftly spread from western Hunan. China missionary and Passionist Procurator Father Arthur Benson cabled the home province on April 27, three days after the murders of Fathers Godfrey, Clement, and Walter had taken place.²⁸⁷ At the same time, Father William Westhoven sent a letter to American Provincial Father Stanislaus Grennan enclosing the original report by Father Anthony Maloney. Calling this "our hour of heavy sorrow," he urged his superior in America to contact the families of all other missionaries and assure them of their safety.²⁸⁸

Also on April 27, Francis P. Lockhart, the United States diplomat assigned to Hankou, cabled Washington, D.C., and informed the

Secretary of State that three Passionist missionaries “were killed by bandits at Chenki [Chenxi] Hunan, on April 24. Have take the matter up with the Chinese authorities.”²⁸⁹ In turn, the Secretary of State communicated the news to Father Stanislaus Grennan, who had already learned of the murders from cable telegrams. American diplomats in China – John Van A. MacMurray, Francis P. Lockhart, and the *chargé d'affaires* at Changsha, Hunan – all demanded the capture and punishment of the guilty parties. Chinese diplomats urged stringent punitive action.²⁹⁰

Chinese general He Jian of Changsha was contacted during a civil ceremony in which Chiang Kai-shek was investing him as the military governor of Hunan.²⁹¹ Within hours he dispatched a full regiment of suppression troops to Huajiao. In addition, he sent two judges to conduct trials. After an investigation by Chinese authorities, Madame Nie, wife of the innkeeper who acted so mysteriously the night before the murders, was summarily executed, along with the chief of the Huajiao Home Guard who refused to protect the priests. Accomplices were also given death penalties.²⁹² Although Captain Nie performed the murders, Chinese officials identified brigand leaders Chen Zemin and Mao Qiying as the architects of the plot to kill the priests. The two men were partisans – professional soldiers who lived in the rugged Yuan River Loop. Their primary occupation was recruiting and training guerillas from the Home Guard militias in small towns.²⁹³ The search to apprehend them would last two years and end without success.

Although the Passionists had a right to seek indemnity for the murders, they refused to do so. This decision was supported by Apostolic Delegate Celso Costantini.²⁹⁴ On behalf of the Passionists, Father William Westhoven asked only that justice prevail, but the prolonged investigation and failure to apprehend the murderers made his grief deepen into anger.

I feel like taking a gun myself and go out ‘Wild West fashion’ to kill the bandits[,] for [the Chinese authorities] were moving all the wheels possible over here, but a mighty PUSH is necessary from Washington.²⁹⁵

While prayers eased the heart, all missionaries suffered a crippling sense of sorrow and disbelief. In his memoir *Human Harvest*, Father Theophane Maguire included the murders as the climax of his book. Upon hearing the news, he felt dazed, his heart “struggling against the truth.”²⁹⁶ Father Jordan Black, a member of the fifth band to China, was sick for three days and had to get someone to replace him to celebrate public Mass.²⁹⁷ Father Godfrey’s confessor, Father Paul Ubinger, sent a letter to Father Godfrey’s mother, Mrs. Mary E. Holbein, confiding in her son’s struggle to remain in the mission or go home, his premonition of a violent death, and the aura of finality that hung over him like a pall before his final journey. Father Paul wrote that, like her, his “heart has been bleeding,” and added “Father Godfrey is a Saint.”²⁹⁸

Back in America, family members, friends, and members of the missionaries’ home parishes struggled to make sense of the tragedy.²⁹⁹ Numerous accounts reflect a perception of martyrdom. In Father Godfrey’s hometown of Baltimore, Mary O’Brien, a friend of the Holbein family, was “horrified.” She learned of his death

when her older sister Jessie read it in *The Sign*. O’Brien automatically considered him a martyr for dying so young in the cause of Christ.³⁰⁰ Equally horrified was Myrtle Holbein, Father Godfrey’s sister-in-law. She recalled Father Godfrey’s mother, a very pious woman, reacting calmly when she received the news from priests who had walked up the street from St. Joseph’s Monastery to notify her.³⁰¹

News of Father Clement Seybold’s death hit hard for his brother, Confrator Mark Seybold. Stephen Paul Kenney, a confrere attending the seminary with him in Baltimore, recalls religious superiors drawing him aside and informing him of the murder before revealing the story to their religious community. At first, Mark was stunned, incapable of speaking. Over time, resignation set in, followed by deep pride.³⁰² In Father Clement’s hometown of Dunkirk, native Joe Klinn grew up with a picture of the missionary in his home because “he was revered ... he was a martyr ... killed because of his belief in Christ.” For a short time Klinn attended the Passionist seminary in Dunkirk, where a portrait of Father Clement adorned the school entrance.³⁰³

Sister James Ellen Woolsey recalls that “the parish wept” when news of Father Walter’s death reached his hometown of Petoskey, Michigan on April 30, 1929. A nine-year-old girl at the time, she had been sitting with the St. Francis Xavier choir when an announcement was made from the pulpit. “There was such an awe in the church that day ... one of our boys that belonged to the parish was murdered.” Her family and the school proclaimed Father Walter a martyr.³⁰⁴ Beatrice Henshaw, Father Walter’s niece, was so moved by the murder that she used China as the theme of her Valedictorian speech at the 1929 Petoskey High School graduation. When Seneca Coveyou, Walter’s mentor since he was a child, heard he was killed, she was brokenhearted.³⁰⁵

In Cincinnati, friends and acquaintances who vividly remembered his herculean efforts to raise funds for the China missions honored his memory by establishing a “Father Walter Guild.”³⁰⁶ Founded after his death in 1929, the Guild continued his “home-front mission” to collect funding for missionary activity in China. The Guild hosted annual card parties and dances for the purpose, and continued to operate throughout the 1930s and 1940s.³⁰⁷ Members of the Father Walter Guild even enjoyed a visit from Cuthbert O’Gara in 1935.³⁰⁸ By that point, the Passionist missionary had been installed as bishop of the new Yuanling diocese in China.³⁰⁹

Motives for Murder

Historians have posited different theories on motives for the murders of Fathers Godfrey Holbein, Clement Seybold, and Walter Coveyou. It is possible that the bandits were simply acting alone. However, it is equally probable that they were actors playing minor roles in a larger political agenda. Utilizing U.S. State Department documentation and reflecting upon his own experiences as a missionary in Republican China, Father Caspar Caulfield believes that the killings were part of a Chinese Communist strategy to shift the balance of power from Nationalist control.³¹⁰

In 1929, the Communist movement was still in its infancy. While

THE PITTSBURGH CATHOLIC

Founded in 1844 by Rev. Michael O'Connor, First Bishop of Pittsburgh Diocese

THIRTY-NINTH YEAR

PITTSBURGH, PA., MAY 2, 1929



Dies in China



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PONTIFICAL MASS TO OPEN JUBILEE PROGRAM SUNDAY

... of the ... of the ...

Holy Name Groups Assist at Unveiling Of Memorial Statue

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New Rochelle Given National Recognition

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BODIES OF YOUNG PASSIONIST PRIESTS SLAIN BY CHINESE REDS RECOVERED; THREE MORE AMERICANS THREATENED

MURDERED PRIESTS STATIONED IN CITY BEFORE DEPARTURE

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Slain Missionaries



Rev. ... of the ...

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AMERICANS URGED TO LEAVE KANCHOW LETTERS DISCLOSE

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Boy Leader Dead



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ITALIAN CHURCH PLANS CEREMONY OF REDEDICATION

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Pittsburgh Sister in Program for Annual Convention of Nurses

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Physicians' Catholic Medical Mission Unit Hears Talk on China

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Program Issued for State Convention of Knights of Columbus

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Holy Name Societies Of Chartiers Valley Hold Credit Holy

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Editor Will Lecture On Woman Question

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REFugee RECOVERED BY WOMEN VISITORS OF 1000 OTHERS

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National Origin Study For Investigative Work by Catholic Educators

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Catholic Boy Who Is Considered 'Prod'

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The deaths of the four Passionist Fathers made front page news in Pittsburgh and around the world

Source: Pittsburgh Catholic, May 2, 1929

Mao Zedong fomented revolution amid the Chinese peasantry, Li Lisan, another early party leader, sought to follow the Russian model and win the hearts and minds of the industrial proletariat.³¹¹ In partnership with new Communist convert He Long – the Communist sympathizer who obstructed Father Constantine’s efforts at evangelization in Longshan – they sought to capture the vast worker base of Wuhan, one of the most populous cities in Central China.³¹² The Communists knew that, when foreigners were captured, their enemy, the Nationalists, sent troops as a response. According to Caulfield’s thesis, the murders served as a diversion that would draw Nationalist troops away from Wuhan and prevent a swift response to Communist attack. Possibly, He Long – a man known for resorting to assassination in the past – doubted that a mere capture-and-ransom routine would have enough impact to achieve the desired effect, and independently concluded that murder was necessary. Chen Zemin and Mao Qiyong engineered the killings at He Long’s behest.

Indeed, the murders succeeded in drawing Nationalist troops to Huajiao, but the gambit to capture Wuhan failed. Li Lisan’s uprising of the industrial proletariat never materialized. Mao Zedong ordered Communist forces in Wuhan to regroup. The Comintern called Li Lisan to trial in Russia, resulting in his downfall. Mao rose to the forefront of Communist leadership in China and committed himself to galvanizing the Chinese peasantry.

Passionist historian Father Robert Carbonneau advances a different theory for the murders.³¹³ Oral tradition in western Hunan holds that the murders were conducted to wrest control of the area from Chinese general Chen Quzhen, a friend of the Passionist missionaries who frequently supported their efforts.³¹⁴ Chen Quzhen enjoyed such a degree of military and political power in Hunan that locals referred to him as the “King of West Hunan.” Based in the city of Fenghuang, he operated independently of the Nationalists, the Communists, and even He Long. In the early 1920s he was a reformer. He founded schools in Hunan, acted as a local political modernizer, and built up modern communications in his region. At the same time he inspired troops under his command by fostering traditional values: he was artless, simple, and chivalrous, with a disdain for luxury. Like He Long, instead of extracting revenue from peasants, he acquired it by taxing opium convoys that traveled through his area. As a general with a formidable army, he frequently defended Hunan from rival armies in neighboring provinces.³¹⁵

In 1927 the Guomindang government tacitly recognized his control over the region by assigning him as deputy to the governing committee of the province, and making him commander of the Thirty-Fourth Division of the national army (granting him control over his own troops). After being installed by Chiang Kai-shek as the military governor of Hunan for the Guomindang, General He Jian may have wanted to solidify his own control of the region. Moreover, the prospect of ousting Chen Quzhen and taxing the opium convoys was an attractive way of gaining revenue. The slaying of foreigners in Chen Quzhen’s domain would have a two-fold effect: first, it would demand the infiltration of Guomindang troops into the territory, shifting the balance of power in favor of

the Nationalists, and it would cause the King of West Hunan to “lose face,” undermining his control.³¹⁶

Apostles in Act, Martyrs in Desire

As the Passionists struggled to gather information about the slaying of their brethren, news of the murders shot through the secular press, and by Sunday, April 28, headlines announcing the deaths of Fathers Godfrey, Clement, and Walter began flashing on the front pages of newspapers – both secular and Catholic – around the world.³¹⁷

News of the murders first appeared in the June 1929 issue of *The Sign*. An editorial by Father Harold Purcell set the tone for coverage. While tacitly acknowledging that the deaths of Fathers Godfrey, Clement, and Walter did not fit the traditional definition of martyrdom, he adopted language that satisfied the audience’s perception of martyrdom:

In the passing of these saintly young missionaries we have a blessing in disguise. Instead of harboring resentment against their murderers we should thank God that these American Passionists were worthy of the vocation wherein they were called: that they unflinchingly bore witness to their Crucified Lord: that as they were Apostles in Act they were Martyrs in Desire, at least: and that the blood of Martyrs is the seed of Christians.³¹⁸

Reports on the murders and obituaries of the deceased priests appeared in the June, July, August, and September 1929 issues of *The Sign*. Pictures of the inn at Huajiao and other locations relevant to the story continued to appear amid content in the October issue. A letter by missionary Father Basil Bauer also appeared in the October issue. After the funeral, he had been appointed the sorrowful task of closing Father Constantine’s former mission at Longshan.³¹⁹

For editors of *The Sign*, the passing of Father Constantine Leech complicated coverage. While editorial content mainly focused upon the three murders, photos of the funeral made it plain that four deaths had occurred. Although Father Constantine’s demise was less sensational, they felt obligated to grant equal validation of his work as a missionary. The January 1930 issue rectified this dilemma with a feature article on Father Constantine Leech, calling him a “Martyr to Duty” who died from the rigors of “mission exposure.”³²⁰ Editors of *The Pittsburgh Press* – a secular newspaper from Father Constantine’s hometown – accepted this interpretation. The April 25, 1931 issue included an article titled, “Dying Priest Travels Mountain Trail Three Days. Notes Left by Martyred Pittsburgh Missionary Tell of Every-Day Life in China.”³²¹ Of all four deaths in April 1929, Father Constantine’s was least compatible with traditional martyrdom. This may demonstrate the influence of *The Sign* in the publications of the day.

After the deaths of Fathers Constantine Leech, Godfrey Holbein, Clement Seybold, and Walter Coveyou, missionary work in western Hunan continued until the rise of Communism forced the Passionists to depart China. Six endured jail sentences at the hands of the Communists, and seven suffered house arrest.³²² The last

two missionaries were expelled in 1955.³²³ Between 1925 and 1950, a total of thirteen American missionaries died in their efforts to convert pagan China. They were accompanied by two native Chinese who joined the Sisters of Charity, and three other missionaries who hailed from Ireland, Canada, and Germany.³²⁴ Buried in a Catholic missionary graveyard in Yuanling (formerly Chenzhou), their remains were relocated in 2004 to a new cemetery outside the city.³²⁵ Despite tectonic shifts in the political landscape of China in the twentieth century, the diocese that the Passionists founded in Yuanling continues to grow from the hardy roots that these missionaries planted nearly a century ago, and consecrated with blood and holy faith.³²⁶ May they all rest in peace.

Endnotes:

¹ The author would like to thank Father Robert Carbonneau, C.P., for the wealth of information provided in support of this article; his area of study focuses on the American Passionist experience in China. This article presents the story of four priests who were members of the Congregation of the Passion (abbreviated C.P.). Readers may assume that the priests and bishops mentioned herein are Passionists — with the exception of James Cardinal Gibbons; Archbishops Celso Costantini and George Mundelein; Bishops Hugh C. Boyle, Ángel Diego y Carbajal, and Michael O'Connor; and Father John F. Hickey. Accordingly, the abbreviation "C.P." will typically not appear in text or endnotes unless necessary.

² "Chinese Language," Wikipedia, last modified August 29, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_language#Tones.

³ "Chinese Numerology," Wikipedia, last modified August 27, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_numerology#Four.

⁴ A Gregorian calendar appears at the website: "Calendar for Year 1929 (United States)," Timeanddate.com, accessed August 29, 2018, <https://www.timeanddate.com/calendar/?year=1929&country=1>.

⁵ American Passionist missionary Father William Westhoven, who was part of the same missionary band as Fathers Godfrey Holbein and Clement Seybold, stated during an interview with Father Robert Carbonneau: "Here's where it was.... Here's where you lay it down. We all expected to die over there [China]. No question! No question!" Robert E. Carbonneau, C.P., "Life, Death, and Memory: Three Passionists in Hunan, China and the Shaping of an American Mission Perspective in the 1920s" (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 1992), 277.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 313. The feast day of St. Paul of the Cross was April 28 until 1970, when it was moved to October 19. See "Paul of the Cross," Wikipedia, last modified March 16, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_of_the_Cross.

⁷ For a formal definition of martyrdom, see: "Christian Martyrs," Wikipedia, last modified August 22, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_martyrs.

⁸ *The Sign* was an official publication of the Passionists from 1921 to 1982. An overview can be found in Michael Glazier and Thomas J. Shelley (eds.), "The Sign," *The Encyclopedia of American Catholic History* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 1297. *The Catholic Telegraph* is the official diocesan newspaper for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. An overview appears at the website: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Catholic_Telegraph. *The Shield* was the official publication of the Catholic Students Mission Crusade (CSMC), a mission education organization launched near Chicago, Illinois, in 1918. A history of the CSMC appears at the website: "Catholic Students Mission Crusade," *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 6th Ed, 2018, accessed August 29, 2018, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/catholic-students-mission-crusade>.

⁹ "Passionists," Wikipedia, last modified August 16, 2018, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passionists>. A profile of St. Paul of the Cross appears at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_of_the_Cross.

¹⁰ K. O'Malley and C. J. Yuhaus, "Passionists," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume 10, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Thomson/Gale 2003), 931-933.

¹¹ The Passionist creed can be found in Glazier and Shelley (eds.), "The Passionists," 1110. See also Malley and Yuhaus, "St. Paul of the Cross," 35.

¹² "Passionists," *Ibid.*, 932.

¹³ Felix Ward, *Passionists: Sketches, Historical and Personal* (New York: Benziger Bros., 1923), 32-33. This can also be read online at the website: <https://archive.org/details/passionistssketc00ward>.

¹⁴ "Characteristics of the Congregation," appearing at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passionists>.

¹⁵ Fabiano Giorgini (ed.), *Regulae et Constitutiones C.P.* (Rome, 1958), 6/1/36ff. The requirement that the rooms be so spartan was relaxed in 1746.

¹⁶ In cold or severe climates, a special dispensation is permitted to consume meat more frequently. "Passionists," accessed August 29, 2018, <https://www.catholicity.encyclopedia/p/passionists.html>. A schedule for the Liturgy of the Hours can be found under "Canonical Hours," Wikipedia, last modified July 07, 2018, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liturgy_of_the_Hours.

¹⁷ Glazier and Shelley, "The Passionists," 1110.

¹⁸ A profile of Bishop Michael O'Connor appears at the website: <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/boconnorm.html>. His visit and invitation to the Passionists is documented in Glazier and Shelley, "The Passionists," 1110.

¹⁹ The band of Passionist pioneers from Italy to America consisted of Fathers Anthony Calandri, superior, Albinus Magno, Stanislaus Parczyk, and Br. Lawrence DiGiacomo. *Celebrating 150 Years of Passionist Ministry in North America and Beyond, 1852-2002* (Beauceville, Quebec: 2002), 11.

²⁰ This is not a complete list of all Passionist foundations — just the ones that existed at the time when the Passionists elected to split the province in two. *Ibid.*, 15-33. A full list of foundations and retreat houses can be found in the cited work.

²¹ Glazier and Shelley, "The Passionists," 1110-1112.

²² A profile of James Cardinal Gibbons appears at the website: David M. Cheney, "James Gibbons," Catholic-Hierarchy, accessed August 29, 2018, <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bgibbonsj.html>.

²³ Ward, *Passionists*, 7.

²⁴ *Celebrating 150 Years*, 11.

²⁵ A summary of the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* appears at "Maximum Illud," Wikipedia, last modified October 22, 2017, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maximum_Illud.

²⁶ Angelyn Dries, O.S.F., *The Missionary Movement in American Catholic History* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 108.

²⁷ Holy Cross Province, the sister province of St. Paul of the Cross west of the Ohio River, was apparently not prepared to send priests to join the mission band at this early stage. Freshly ordained to the priesthood in May 1929, Father Walter Coveyou expressed interest in joining the missions, but as a member of Holy Cross Province, his request was denied. Father Francis Flaherty, "Fr. Walter Coveyou, C.P.," *The Sign* 9, no. 1 (August 1929), 51-52.

²⁸ Acts of the Twentieth Provincial Chapter of the Province of St. Paul of the Cross Held in the Retreat of St. Paul of the Cross, Pittsburgh, PA, from August 20th to August 28th, 1920, appears at "Passionist Historical Archives," Acts of Twentieth Chapter — 1920, accessed August 29, 2018, <http://cpprovince.org/archives/chapters/chapter-1920.php>.

²⁹ Father Robert Carbonneau, "The Passionists in China, 1921-1929: An Essay in Mission Experience," *The Catholic Historical Review* 66, no. 3 (July 1980), 393.

³⁰ A listing of Provincials of St. Paul of the Cross Province appears at the website: "Passionist Historical Archives," Provincials of St. Paul of the Cross Province, accessed August 29, 2018, <http://www.cpprovince.org/archives/bios/provincials.php>, where access is provided to brief biographies of the provincials. Father Stanislaus Grennan appears at the website: <http://www.cpprovince.org/archives/bios/9/9-26a.php> and Father Justin Carey appears at the website: <http://www.cpprovince.org/archives/bios/1/1-17b.php>.

³¹ A summary of the Passionist Order's mission history in China appears at: "Passionist Historical Archives," Historical Summary China, accessed August 29, 2018, <http://cpprovince.org/archives/histsummary/china-sum.php>.

³² "Republic of China (1912–1949)," Wikipedia, last modified August 28,

- 2018, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_China_\(1912–1949\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_China_(1912–1949)).
- ³³ Comparisons between the first Italian missionaries to the United States and the American missionaries headed to China are underscored by an interview with Father Stephen Paul Kenney, recorded by Father Robert Carbonneau in 1988. “Chinese missionaries were portrayed as similar to the early missionaries that came to America ... and what a tremendous adventure this was.” Carbonneau, “Life, Death, and Memory,” 59.
- ³⁴ As mentioned by Father Robert Carbonneau in “Life, Death, and Memory,” it is worth noting that the China missions were not the only method of outreach by American Passionists at this time. Attention was being paid to preaching in Canada. The Archconfraternity of the Passion was being created to promote understanding of the Passion and bring the laity into a closer relationship with the Passionists. Efforts were also underway for outreach to immigrants in the United States. Parish mission preaching was also a priority. *Ibid.*, 51-52.
- ³⁵ The first mission band consisted of five priests and one brother: Fathers Timothy McDermott from Pittsburgh, PA; Celestine Roddan from Randolph, MA, the superior of the mission; Agatho Purtill from West Hoboken, NJ; Flavian Mullins from Athens, PA; Raphael Vance of Philadelphia, PA; and Br. Lambert Budde from Holland. Caspar Caulfield, C.P., *Only a Beginning: The Passionists in China, 1921-1931* (Union City, NJ: Passionist Press, 1990), 3.
- ³⁶ “The Second Departure Ceremony of Passionist Missionaries for China,” *The Sign* 2, no. 4 (November 1922), 171. The second band consisted of three missionaries: Fathers Paul Joseph Ubinger of Pittsburgh, PA; Kevin Murray of Providence, RI; and Father Dominic Langenbacher of Pittsburgh, PA. Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 47.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.
- ³⁸ Carbonneau, “Life, Death, and Memory,” 52-53.
- ³⁹ “China Calls,” *The Sign* 1, No. 4 (November 1921), 21-23.
- ⁴⁰ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 42.
- ⁴¹ Father Celestine Roddan, “With the Passionists in China: Hankou [Hankou] to Changteh [Changde],” *The Sign* 1, no. 11 (June 1922), 36-39.
- ⁴² Carbonneau, *Life, Death and Memory*, 94.
- ⁴³ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 132.
- ⁴⁴ Father Nicholas Schneiders, “Father Constantine Leech, C.P., A Martyr to Duty,” *The Sign* 9, no. 6 (January 1930), 370.
- ⁴⁵ Father Theophane Maguire, *Hunan Harvest* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1946), 49-50.
- ⁴⁶ Father Harold Purcell, “Off for the High Romance!,” *The Sign* 3, no. 1 (August 1923), 12.
- ⁴⁷ The following Passionists comprised the third mission band: Fathers Edmund Campbell of Wilkes-Barre, PA, the superior of the band; Arthur Benson, a native of Darlington, England who immigrated with his family to Pittsburgh at the tender age of five; Dunstan Thomas of Melrose, MA; and Quentin Olwell of Brooklyn, NY. *Ibid.* The name of the ship carrying the third band to China is found in “The Latest Arrivals,” *The Sign* 3, no. 4 (November 1923), 172.
- ⁴⁸ The description of Father Constantine Leech is found on his 1923 passport application under the name “Constantine J. Leech,” appearing at the website: <https://www.ancestry.com>.
- ⁴⁹ “Two Pittsburghers Become Passionists, and Two More to be Ordained on Sunday,” *The Pittsburgh Catholic*, February 1, 1923, 1. The location of the Manchester district of Pittsburgh appears at the website: “Manchester (Pittsburgh),” Wikipedia, last modified January 15, 2018, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manchester_\(Pittsburgh\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manchester_(Pittsburgh)). Father Constantine’s baptismal name and family details originate from census records taken in 1900 in Allegheny County, Pittsburgh, PA. The census file appears at the website: <https://www.ancestry.com>.
- ⁵⁰ A single headstone marks the grave sites of Father Constantine Leech’s mother, Mary A. Leech, and his father, John F. Leech. A brother, John H. Leech, is also buried here. No birth dates are noted for the Leech family members, only death dates. John F. Leech’s date of death is recorded as November 2, 1892. The headstone can be found at the website: Find A Grave, accessed August 29, 2018, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/109651756>.
- ⁵¹ An explanation of the spelling of Chinese names is necessary. There are two systems for transliterating Mandarin Chinese characters to the Roman alphabet: (1) Wade-Giles (1859, modified 1892), which would have been used during the time of the Passionist China missions, and (2) pinyin, which was developed by the Chinese government and approved as the standard in 1958. In still other cases, the missionaries used their own versions of Chinese names. This article uses the pinyin system. If primary sources use Wade-Giles or missionary terms in direct quotes of material, the standardized pinyin version follows in brackets.
- ⁵² Carbonneau, “The Passionists in China, 1921-1929: An Essay in Mission Experience,” 395.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 400. The name of the town of Yuanzhou was later changed to Zhijiang.
- ⁵⁴ Father Basil Bauer, C.P., “In Journeying Often,” *The Sign* 12, no. 12 (July 1933), 735. Information on the sampan boat appears at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sampan>.
- ⁵⁵ Maguire, *Hunan Harvest*, 113.
- ⁵⁶ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 132.
- ⁵⁷ Schneiders, “Father Constantine Leech, C.P., A Martyr to Duty,” 372.
- ⁵⁸ Father Constantine Leech, “Exalting the Cross in Lungshan [Longshan],” *The Sign* 6, No. 1 (August 1926), 52.
- ⁵⁹ Father Constantine’s methods of dealing with travel through known bandit activity are evident in *ibid.*, 51-54, and “Lungshan [Longshan],” *The Sign* 8, No. 8 (March 1929), 501.
- ⁶⁰ Carbonneau, “The Passionists in China, 1921-1929,” 396.
- ⁶¹ Barbara W. Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911-45* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1973), 79.
- ⁶² Father Constantine Leech, “On the Yuan River,” *The Sign* 3, No. 5 (January 1924), 260.
- ⁶³ Father Constantine Leech, “At Yungshunfu [Yongshun],” *The Sign* 3, No. 8 (March 1924), 349-350.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁵ Letter from Father Agatho Purtill to Father Sebastian Ochsenreiter, November 26, 1922, Passionist Historical Archives Collection, Weinberg Memorial Library, The University of Scranton, Scranton, PA [hereinafter PHAC].
- ⁶⁶ Letter from Father Celestine Roddan to Provincial, November 13, 1923, PHAC.
- ⁶⁷ Letter from Father Dominic Langenbacher to Provincial, November 29, 1926, PHAC.
- ⁶⁸ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 45.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.
- ⁷⁰ Hunan has a subtropical climate characterized by dry, chilly winters and hot, humid summers. See “Climate” appearing at the website: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Hunan. The difficulties of climate are also discussed in Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 45.
- ⁷¹ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 48-49.
- ⁷² The Passionists decided to wear Chinese garb on the street, or any occasion when wearing Passionist habits might invite criticism or disunion from fellow missionaries laboring in China. *Ibid.*, 63.
- ⁷³ Schneiders, “Fr. Constantine Leech, C.P., A Martyr to Duty,” 371.
- ⁷⁴ Carbonneau, “The Passionists in China, 1921-1929: An Essay in Mission Experience,” 402.
- ⁷⁵ Schneiders, “Fr. Constantine Leech, C.P., A Martyr to Duty,” 371.
- ⁷⁶ A summary of Chinese catechist training is found in Carbonneau, “The Passionists in China: 1921-1929,” 400-401.
- ⁷⁷ In China during the 1920s, the ratio of medical doctors to people was 1 in 100,000. Maguire, *Hunan Harvest*, 65. Passionist medical training in Pittsburgh is stated by two sources. See Carbonneau, “Life, Death, and Memory,” 63, and Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 88.
- ⁷⁸ Father Constantine Leech, “Paotsing [Baojing] and Yungshunfu [Yongshun],” *The Sign* 4, No. 11 (June 1925), 479.
- ⁷⁹ Father Agatho Purtill, “Soldier or Bandit,” *The Sign* 3, No. 10 (May 1924), 438.

- ⁸⁰ Father Constantine Leech, "Sick Calls in China," *The Sign* 3, No. 12 (July 1924), 528.
- ⁸¹ Schneiders, "Father Constantine Leech, C.P.," 372.
- ⁸² *Ibid.*
- ⁸³ Leech, "Paotsing [Baojing] and Yungshunfu [Yongshun]," 478-480.
- ⁸⁴ Schneiders, "Fr. Constantine Leech, C.P.," 373.
- ⁸⁵ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 133.
- ⁸⁶ Father Basil Bauer, "Back and Forth," *The Sign* 9, No. 3 (October 1929), 181.
- ⁸⁷ Leech, "Exalting the Cross in Lungshan [Longshan]," 53.
- ⁸⁸ Father Constantine Leech, "Lungshan [Longshan]: The Crimson Menace," *The Sign* 6, No. 5 (December 1926), 310.
- ⁸⁹ A detailed profile of He Long appears at the website: "He Long," Wikipedia, last modified August 17, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/He_Long.
- ⁹⁰ "Xenophobia, Christophobia," appearing at the website: "Gelaohui," Wikipedia, last modified May 28, 2018, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gelaohui>.
- ⁹¹ Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China: The Classic Account of the Birth of Chinese Communism* (New York: Random House, 1944), 78-80.
- ⁹² Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 133.
- ⁹³ Father Cuthbert O'Gara was a member of the fourth band to arrive in China in 1924.
- ⁹⁴ Schneiders, "Fr. Constantine Leech, C.P., A Martyr to Duty," 378.
- ⁹⁵ A detailed description of the Republic of China and the turmoil of its evolution in 1920s China is available at the website: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_China_\(1912-1949\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_China_(1912-1949)).
- ⁹⁶ An overview of the Nationalist Party of China, known as the Kuomintang [Guomindang], appears at: "Kuomintang," Wikipedia, last modified August 24, 2018, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuomintang>. "Communist Party of China," Wikipedia, last modified August 26, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communist_Party_of_China.
- ⁹⁷ "Boxer Rebellion," appearing at the website: "Boxer Rebellion," Wikipedia, last modified August 27, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boxer_Rebellion. See also "May Thirtieth Movement," appearing at the website: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/May_Thirtieth_Movement.
- ⁹⁸ A brief overview appears at the website: "Shaji, Guangzhou," Wikipedia, last modified August 3, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaji,_Guangzhou.
- ⁹⁹ A taste of these dangers appears in *The Sign* articles: Father Celestine Roddan, "Famine," *The Sign* 1, No. 12 (July 1922), 36-39; Father Agatho Purtill, "Glad to be Alive," *The Sign* 2, No. 4 (November 1922), 174-175; Father Timothy McDermott, "The Martyr Spirit," *The Sign* 3, No. 5 (December 1923), 214-216; Father Arthur Benson, "Two Exciting Rides," *The Sign* 3, No. 5 (December 1923), 216-218.
- ¹⁰⁰ Father Robert Carbonneau, taped interview with Stephen Paul Kenny, West Hartford, CT (June 2, 1988), Carbonneau Personal Archives [hereinafter CPA].
- ¹⁰¹ Carbonneau, "Life, Death, and Memory," 317-318.
- ¹⁰² Letter from Confrator Godfrey Holbein to Gertrude Holbein, West Hoboken, NJ, 1922, HOL/1929, PHAC.
- ¹⁰³ Gertrude Holbein, "Sketch of the life of Rev. Godfrey Holbein, C.P., prior to his departure of the Chinese Mission 6/21/1929," File / Holbein, Godfrey, C.P. 4th Band to China-1924 Missionary Correspondence [MC]/1929, [hereafter HOL/1929], PHAC.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* A detailed overview of the Holbein family is provided by Father Robert Carbonneau in "Life, Death, and Memory," 17.
- ¹⁰⁵ Father Godfrey Holbein's description is found in his 1924 passport application under the baptismal name "Claude A. Holbein [Godfrey Holbein]," appearing at the website: <https://www.ancestry.com>.
- ¹⁰⁶ Claude Holbein's sister Margaret joined the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Philadelphia as Sister Mary Hyacinthe. His sisters Genevieve and Teresa joined the Sisters of Mercy in Baltimore as Sister Mary Clothilde and Sister Mary Hildegard, respectively. A fourth sister, Mary, intended to join the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Philadelphia, but died at age 23 on May 13, 1906. "Family of Fr. Godfrey," HOL/1929, PHAC.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁸ A short bio of Father Godfrey Holbein appears at: "Father Godfrey Holbein, C.P.," Provincials of St. Paul of the Cross Province, accessed August 29, 2018, <http://www.cprovince.org/archives/bios/4/4-24b.php>.
- ¹⁰⁹ Father Clement's birth date is recorded in his death certificate. The document is available online: "Lawrence Seybold" in *Reports of Deaths of American Citizens Abroad, 1835-1974*, appearing at the website: <https://www.ancestry.com>. Family details are confirmed by 1900 census records available at the website: <https://www.ancestry.com>.
- ¹¹⁰ Father Rupert Langenbacher, "Fr. Clement Seybold, C.P.," *The Sign* 9, No. 2 (September 1929), 119. A bio of St. Lawrence appears at the website: "Saint Lawrence," Wikipedia, last modified August 17, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Lawrence.
- ¹¹¹ Father Clement's brothers were Leon, Francis, and Anthony Seybold of Dunkirk, and Hermann Seybold, who followed him into the Passionist order and became Father Mark Seybold. His two sisters were Ms. Arthur Sibelkorn and Mrs. Rosella Seybold of Dunkirk. Father Clement's family details are found in a newspaper article announcing Father Clement's slaying by Chinese bandits: "Dunkirk Priest Murdered by Chinese Bandits," *Dunkirk Evening Observer*, April 29, 1929, 1, 13. A short bio of Father Clement's brother, Father Mark Seybold, appears at the website: "Father Mark Seybold, C.P.," Provincials of St. Paul of the Cross Province, accessed August 29, 2018, <http://www.cprovince.org/archives/bios/1/1-14f.php>.
- ¹¹² Father Clement Seybold's description is found in his 1924 passport application under his baptismal name "Lawrence J. Seybold," appearing at the website: <https://www.ancestry.com>.
- ¹¹³ Carbonneau, "Life, Death, and Memory," 15-16.
- ¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.
- ¹¹⁵ Langenbacher, "Fr. Clement Seybold, C.P.," 120.
- ¹¹⁶ A description of mastoiditis appears at the website: "Mastoiditis," Wikipedia, last modified July 28, 2018, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mastoiditis>.
- ¹¹⁷ On Father Clement's passport application, under "defining marks" he mentions a scar behind his right ear, presumably for surgery. The infection may have specifically been on his right ear.
- ¹¹⁸ Carbonneau, "Life, Death, and Memory," 54-55.
- ¹¹⁹ Father Cuthbert O'Gara initially traveled to China as a missionary for the purpose of becoming vicar apostolic of the new prefecture in China. Once he arrived in China, the plans for him to occupy this position collapsed due to indecision by Father Dominic Langenbacher, superior of the missions in China. Later on, once the Passionists had their own Diocese of Yuanling, Father Cuthbert was ordained Bishop Cuthbert Martin O'Gara. Information appears at David M. Cheney, "Cutbert Martin O'Gara," Catholic-Hierarchy, accessed August 29, 2018, <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bogara.html>. The history of Father Cuthbert's original plans to become vicar apostolic are found in Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 88-90.
- ¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 88-89. The assertion of this band being the largest in American history is reported in the article, "Thirteen Mission Workers for China," *The Scranton Republican*, June 6, 1924, 12. The fourth mission band to China included the following priests from St. Paul of the Cross Province: Fathers Theophane Maguire from Wayne, PA; Basil Bauer from Sharon, PA; Terence Connolly from Woburn, MA; Jeremiah McNamara from Philadelphia, PA; Rupert Langenbacher from Pittsburgh, PA; Clement Seybold from Dunkirk, NY; Ernest Cunningham from Boston, MA; and Godfrey Holbein from Baltimore, MD. Holy Cross Province contributed the following priests: Fathers Anthony Maloney from Louisville, KY; Cyprian Frank from Mt. Carmel, IL; William Westhoven from Boston, MA; and Gregory McEttrick from Ripon, WI. Father Cuthbert O'Gara, professor of English at Holy Cross Preparatory College at Dunkirk, NY, was the last priest to join the "Lucky Thirteen" mission band.
- ¹²¹ See Bishop Ángel Diego y Carbajal's profile appearing at David M. Cheney, "Angel Diego y Carbajal," Catholic-Hierarchy, accessed August 29, 2018, <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bdica.html>. Also note that "Changde" is the pinyin spelling used for the Chinese

- city. In cases where the Wade-Giles Romanization is used, it appears as “Changte.”
- ¹²² Passionist medical training in Pittsburgh is stated in two sources: (1) Father Robert Carbonneau’s interview with missionary Father William Westhoven, who was in the same mission band as Fathers Godfrey Holbein and Clement Seybold, and (2) Caspar Caulfield’s statement that the missionaries readying for departure were attending classes in first aid at a Catholic hospital in Pittsburgh. There is no mention of which hospital offered the courses. See Carbonneau, “Life, Death, and Memory,” 63, and Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 88.
- ¹²³ Letter from Godfrey Holbein to Provincial, Pittsburgh, PA (October 21, 1923), File/Holbein MC/1923, PHAC.
- ¹²⁴ Clement Seybold and Godfrey Holbein’s ordination by Bishop Hugh C. Boyle of Pittsburgh is documented in obituary articles in *The Sign*: “Fr. Godfrey Holbein, C.P.,” *The Sign* 9, no. 2 (September 1929), 117, and Langenbacher, “Fr. Clement Seybold, C.P.,” 120. Details on Bishop Boyle appear at the website: David M. Cheney, “Hugh Charles Boyle,” Catholic-Hierarchy, accessed August 29, 2018, <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bboyle.html>.
- ¹²⁵ The 1924 departure ceremonies were held in Union City, NJ, on May 18; Boston, MA, on May 25; Baltimore, MD, in early June; Scranton, PA, on June 8; Dunkirk, NY, in mid-June; Pittsburgh, PA, on June 15; Cincinnati, OH, on June 19; Louisville, KY, on June 29; St. Louis, MO, on July 3; and finally in San Francisco, CA, on July 22, when the missionaries departed for China. See Carbonneau, “Life, Death, and Memory,” 63-72.
- ¹²⁶ Father Robert Carbonneau, taped interview with Father William Westhoven, Detroit, MI (July 24, 1976), CPA.
- ¹²⁷ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 89.
- ¹²⁸ Father Anthony Maloney, “Maloney Document,” (July 26, 1973), PHAC.
- ¹²⁹ Letter from Father Clement Seybold to Mark Seybold, Chenzhou, China (September 27, 1924), Seybold: Folder / “Father Clement Seybold C.P. — Letters (From China) to his brother Conf[rater] Mark Francis [Seybold]” /MC 1929 [hereinafter CSMF], PHAC. Greater detail on Father Clement Seybold’s efforts to prepare Mark for missionary work in China appears in Carbonneau, “Life, Death, and Memory,” 156.
- ¹³⁰ Father Godfrey Holbein, C.P., “The Supu [Xupu] News,” *The Sign* 5, no. 8 (March 1926), 343.
- ¹³¹ Letter from Father Godfrey Holbein to Sister Mary Hildegard, Chenzhou, China, July 5, 1925, File/Letters to his sister, S.M. Hildegard (from China) MC/1929 [hereinafter GHSH], PHAC.
- ¹³² Letter from Father Godfrey Holbein to Sister Mary Hildegard, Chenzhou, China, October 20, 1924, GHSH, PHAC.
- ¹³³ Carbonneau, “Life, Death, and Memory,” 160.
- ¹³⁴ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 121.
- ¹³⁵ Father Constantine Leech composed at least twelve articles for *The Sign*. Father Clement authored only four, and Father Godfrey only three.
- ¹³⁶ Carbonneau, “Life, Death, and Memory,” 162-164.
- ¹³⁷ Letter from Father Clement Seybold to Mark Seybold, Yanzhou, China, February 17, 1926, CSMF, PHAC.
- ¹³⁸ Father Dominic Langenbacher’s installation as prefect apostolic is documented in Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 123-126. At this point Father Dominic received the title of “Monsignor.”
- ¹³⁹ Letter from Father Clement Seybold to Mark Seybold, Qianyang, China, November 5, 1925, CSMF, PHAC.
- ¹⁴⁰ Letter from Father Clement Seybold to Mark Seybold, Qianyang, China, January 6, 1926, CSMF, PHAC.
- ¹⁴¹ Father Clement mentioned the incident with Father Kevin Murray in a letter home. Letter from Father Clement Seybold to My Sister and All, Chenzhou, March 2, 1925. The dramatic incident with Father Ernest Cunningham is well-documented in an issue of *The Sign*: Father Arthur Benson, “Fr. Ernest Cunningham: The Story of His Capture and Release,” *The Sign* 6, No.3 (October 1926), 177-181.
- ¹⁴² Letter from Father Clement Seybold to My Sister, Qianyang, China, October 17, 1926, In File/Letters To From China to his family MC/1929 [hereinafter CSF], PHAC.
- ¹⁴³ Letter from Seybold to My Sister and All, Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁴ Letter from Father Clement Seybold to Mark Seybold, Chenzhou, China, November 2, 1924, CSMF, PHAC.
- ¹⁴⁵ A description of Father Edmund Campbell’s death is documented in Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 113-114. His death is also mentioned in a letter from Father Clement Seybold to Mark Seybold, Chenzhou China, April 28, 1925, CSMF, PHAC.
- ¹⁴⁶ Langenbacher, “Fr. Clement Seybold, C.P.,” 120.
- ¹⁴⁷ Letter from Father Godfrey Holbein to Sister Hildegard, Chenzhou, September 1925, GHSH, PHAC.
- ¹⁴⁸ A description of the Xupu mission is found in Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 26.
- ¹⁴⁹ Letter from Father Godfrey Holbein to Sister Hildegard, Xupu, China, September 7, 1925, GHSH, PHAC.
- ¹⁵⁰ Letter from Father Godfrey Holbein to Sister Hildegard, Xupu, China, December 3, 1925, GHSH, PHAC.
- ¹⁵¹ Letter from Father Godfrey Holbein to Sister Hildegard, Xupu, China, September 7, 1925, GHSH, PHAC.
- ¹⁵² Letter from Father Godfrey Holbein to Sister Hildegard, Xupu, China, December 17, 1925, GHSH, PHAC.
- ¹⁵³ Letter from Father Godfrey Holbein to Sister Hildegard, Xupu, China, October 28, 1925, GHSH, PHAC.
- ¹⁵⁴ “Chinese 臉面 and 面子” appearing at: “Face (sociological Concept),” Wikipedia, last modified August 16, 2018, , [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Face_\(sociological_concept\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Face_(sociological_concept)).
- ¹⁵⁵ Letter from Father Godfrey Holbein to Sister Hildegard, Xupu, China, December 17, 1925, GHSH, PHAC.
- ¹⁵⁶ Letter from Father Godfrey Holbein to Sister Hildegard, Xupu, China, June 1, 1926, GHSH, PHAC.
- ¹⁵⁷ Letter from Father Flavian Mullins to Father Stanislaus Grennan, Xupu, China, March 20, 1926, File/Mullins MC/1926, PHAC.
- ¹⁵⁸ Letter from Father Arthur Benson to Father Stanislaus Grennan, Chenxi, April 8, 1926, File/Benson MC/1926, PHAC.
- ¹⁵⁹ A profile on Apostolic Delegate Archbishop Celso Benigno Luigi Costantini appears at the website: David M. Cheney, “Celso Benigno Luigi Costantini,” Catholic-Hierarchy, accessed August 29, 2018, <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bcostc.html>.
- ¹⁶⁰ Carbonneau, “Life, Death, and Memory,” 221.
- ¹⁶¹ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 75.
- ¹⁶² “Comintern” is an abbreviation for Communist International, an organization that advocated worldwide communism. Information appears at: “Communist International,” August 16, 2018, accessed August 29, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communist_International.
- ¹⁶³ A profile of Comintern agent Michael Borodin appears at: “Mikhail Borodin,” Wikipedia, last modified July 16, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Borodin. For information on diplomat Adolfe Joffe, see: “Adolfe Joffe,” Wikipedia, last modified August 3, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolph_Joffe. The involvement of Borodin and Joffe is also mentioned in Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 75-76.
- ¹⁶⁴ An overview of the First United Front appears at the website: “First United Front,” Wikipedia, last modified April 19, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_United_Front.
- ¹⁶⁵ An overview of the Northern Expedition appears at the website: “Northern Expedition,” Wikipedia, last modified August 22, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Expedition.
- ¹⁶⁶ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 135.
- ¹⁶⁷ These incidents are the aforementioned “May 30th Incident” and the massacre at Shaji.
- ¹⁶⁸ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 143-144.
- ¹⁶⁹ This text originates from a letter written by Father Dominic Langenbacher to Sister M. Ignatius, March 22, 1927. Also, the current location of the letter itself is unknown. Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 145.
- ¹⁷⁰ A profile of American diplomat John Carter Vincent appears at the website: “John Carter Vincent,” last modified August 8, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Carter_Vincent.

- ¹⁷¹ Memorandum from John Carter Vincent, Chenzhou, China, January 12, 1927. A copy of this letter exists in the Passionist Historical Archives in File/Mission Management MC/1927, PHAC.
- ¹⁷² Carbonneau, "Life, Death, and Memory," 202.
- ¹⁷³ The consul complained to Father Flavian that Msgr. Dominic Langenbacher had not returned his telegrams. This was due in part, Father Flavian thought, because Msgr. Dominic did not have "much knowledge of Chinese politics." Father Flavian, in fact, was in agreement with the bishop of Changsha who said Dominic "is as a *child in China*," adding, "I am afraid the Passionists have acquired a name for either imprudence or *ignorance* in this affair." [emphasis in the original]. Letter from Father Flavian Mullins, C.P., to Father Stanislaus Grennan, C.P., Changsha, China, February 8, 1927, File/Mullins MC/1927, PHAC.
- ¹⁷⁴ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 169.
- ¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.
- ¹⁷⁶ Maguire, *Hunan Harvest*, 114.
- ¹⁷⁷ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 148.
- ¹⁷⁸ Maguire, *Hunan Harvest*, 110.
- ¹⁷⁹ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 162.
- ¹⁸⁰ Schneiders, "Fr. Constantine Leech," 375-376.
- ¹⁸¹ Four Sisters of St. Joseph from Baden, Pennsylvania arrived in China to assist the Passionists in 1926. They included Sisters Florence Sullivan, St. Anne Callahan, Clarissa Stattmiller, and Christina Werth. Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 139. Basic details on the sisters appear at the website: "Sisters of St. Joseph," Provincials of St. Paul of the Cross Province, accessed August 29, 2018, <http://www.cprovince.org/archives/sesqui/statistics/china-srs-of-st-joseph.php>.
- ¹⁸² Sister Clarissa Stattmiller would also be recognized as a "Martyr in Desire" in *The Sign* after the deaths of Fathers Godfrey, Clement, Walter, and Constantine. Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 170-171.
- ¹⁸³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.
- ¹⁸⁵ The four missionaries wrote a letter to Msgr. Dominic, prefect apostolic, and Father Cuthbert O'Gara, prefect delegate, explaining their stance on remaining at their posts. *Ibid.*, 159.
- ¹⁸⁶ Letter from Father Clement Seybold to sister and brothers, Qianyang, China, January 28, 1927, CSF, PHAC.
- ¹⁸⁷ Carbonneau describes activity in Qianyang in greater depth in "Life, Death, and Memory," 186-196.
- ¹⁸⁸ Letter from Father Clement Seybold to Sister [no location], June 7, 1927, CSF, PHAC.
- ¹⁸⁹ Letter from Father Godfrey Holbein to Sister Hildegard, Shanghai, China, October 1927, GHSH, PHAC.
- ¹⁹⁰ Letter from Father Godfrey Holbein to Sister Hildegard, Hankou, China, February 26, 1927, GHSH, PHAC.
- ¹⁹¹ The existence of this cable is found in a letter written by Father Constantine Leech. "Our Rt. Reverend Prefect [Msgr. Dominic] has called Father Godfrey and myself to return to Shenchow [Chenzhou] to-gether with the Sisters of Charity...." Letter from Father Constantine Leech to Provincial Father Stanislaus Grennan, Hankou, China (December 6, 1927), File/Leech MC/1927, PHAC. The order is also confirmed by another letter from Father Anthony Maloney to Provincial Father Stanislaus Grennan, Wangcun, China, December 30, 1927, File/Maloney MC/1927, PHAC.
- ¹⁹² Evidence of Father Terence Connolly returning home without permission is found in a letter from Father Stanislaus Grennan to Msgr. Dominic Langenbacher [Union City], December 17, 1927, File/Mission Management MC/1927, PHAC.
- ¹⁹³ Letter from Father Stanislaus Grennan to the "Heroic Prefect and Missioners — Priests, Brother, and Sisters working in China," [Union City], March 12, 1927, File/Mission Management MC/1927, PHAC.
- ¹⁹⁴ Excerpts from letters in "With the Passionists in China" begin in the April 1927 issue and last until the August 1927 issue. Carbonneau, "Life, Death, and Memory," 198-199.
- ¹⁹⁵ Dorothy Borg, *American Policy and the Chinese Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947), 256-66. The writer in those pages examines editorial policy of the secular press.
- ¹⁹⁶ *The Pittsburgh Catholic*, April 7, 1927, 1.
- ¹⁹⁷ *The Pittsburgh Catholic*, May 19, 1927, 1.
- ¹⁹⁸ "Dunkirk Priests Missing in China; Father Clement Seybold With Party of Missionaries in Hunan Who Fled From Looted Missions," *The Dunkirk Evening Observer*, May 14, 1927, 1.
- ¹⁹⁹ "All Passionists Safe in Chinese Missions," *The Dunkirk Evening Observer*, June 15, 1927, 4.
- ²⁰⁰ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 179.
- ²⁰¹ Father Caspar Caulfield devotes an entire chapter to the visitation of Father Sebastian Ochsenreiter to Hunan. Contents include individual meetings with each missionary, discussions of financial control of money, whether to obey the Apostolic Delegate or religious superior, and lastly Father Ochsenreiter's meeting with Apostolic Delegate Costantini. *Ibid.*, 185-205.
- ²⁰² *Ibid.*, 196.
- ²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 202. Father Robert Carbonneau includes more detail from Father Ochsenreiter's meeting with Father Clement Seybold in "Life, Death, and Memory," 212-214.
- ²⁰⁴ Letter from Father Stanislaus Grennan to Msgr. Dominic Langenbacher, Union City, December 17, 1927, PHAC.
- ²⁰⁵ Father Sebastian Ochsenreiter visitation notes, MC/1929, PHAC.
- ²⁰⁶ Letter from Father Stanislaus Grennan to Msgr. Dominic Langenbacher, December 17, 1927, PHAC.
- ²⁰⁷ Msgr. Dominic Langenbacher to Father Stanislaus Grennan, Xupu, China, March 17, 1928, File/D. Langenbacher MC/1928, PHAC.
- ²⁰⁸ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 205.
- ²⁰⁹ Letter from Father Godfrey Holbein to Sister Hildegard, Chenzhou, China, December 17, 1928, GHSH, PHAC.
- ²¹⁰ In the interim between the fourth and sixth bands, a fifth band of Passionists had departed San Francisco on September 4, 1926, on the *S.S. President Wilson*. This included four missionaries: Fathers Jordan Black, Miles McCarthy, Cormac Shanahan, and Caspar Conley. The mission band dubbed itself "The Four Horsemen." Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 139.
- ²¹¹ The sixth band of Passionist missionaries consisted of three priests from Holy Cross Province: Father Walter Coveyou from Petoskey, Michigan; Father Nicholas Schneiders, originally from Holland but a naturalized citizen of the United States; and Father Francis Flaherty from Cincinnati, Ohio. *Ibid.*, 205.
- ²¹² Father Walter's height and physical details are found on his World War I draft registration card, available under the name "Walter Coveyou" appearing at the website: <https://www.ancestry.com>.
- ²¹³ Father Walter's birth date is recorded in his death certificate. The document is available online: "Walter Coveyou" in *Reports of Deaths of American Citizens Abroad, 1835-1974*, appearing at the website: <https://www.ancestry.com>.
- ²¹⁴ The State of Michigan defines a pioneer as "a person who took up residence in an area within the first twenty years of its settlement." Walter's parents came from Canada and settled in Bear Creek Township, Emmet County (which later became Petoskey), in 1874. Carbonneau, "Life, Death and Memory," 83-84.
- ²¹⁵ *Ibid.* Evidence of St. Francis Xavier's long, rich Catholic history is found at the website: St Francis History, accessed August 29, 2018, <http://www.petoskeysfx.org/history.html>.
- ²¹⁶ Biography of Father Henry Miller, available at the website: <http://www.cprovince.org/archives/bios/1/1-12d.php>.
- ²¹⁷ Flaherty, "Fr. Walter Coveyou, C.P.," 51. Father Walter was given the baptismal name "Walter" and thus did not change his name when he became a Passionist. His name is confirmed by the 1900 census for Emmet County, Bear Creek Township, District 0083, in Michigan, appearing at the website: <https://www.ancestry.com>.
- ²¹⁸ Carbonneau, "Life, Death, and Memory," 86-87.
- ²¹⁹ A profile of Archbishop (later Cardinal) George Mundelein appears at the website: David M. Cheney, "George Mundelein," Catholic-Hierarchy, accessed August 29, 2018, <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bmund.html>.

- ²²⁰ Father Robert Carbonneau, taped interview with Father Conleth Overman, C.P., Detroit, MI (June 25, 1989), CPA.
- ²²¹ Flaherty, "Walter Coveyou, C.P.," 52-53.
- ²²² Carbonneau, "Life, Death, and Memory," 111-112.
- ²²³ "Student Mission Crusade Adopts Plan of Action. Committee of Forty-five Educators to Outline Program for Promotion of Mission Education — New Officers Elected," *The Catholic Advance*, July 10, 1926, 15.
- ²²⁴ "Newly Ordained Priest Is Assigned to China," *The Catholic Telegraph*, November 15, 1923, 4; "U.S. Demands Protection for Passionists in China," *The Catholic Telegraph*, January 17, 1924, 1.
- ²²⁵ Carbonneau, "Life, Death, and Memory," 95. Father Walter authored the letter, though no specifics on the date or the recipient are provided. It originated from a quote sent by Father Roger Mercurio, Passionist historian and former Provincial of Holy Cross Province, to Father Carbonneau.
- ²²⁶ Father Robert Carbonneau, taped interview with Beatrice Henshaw, Petoskey, MI (July 6, 1989), CPA.
- ²²⁷ "Religious Notes," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, September 8, 1928, 7.
- ²²⁸ Father Walter is listed as one of the clergy members who attended a meeting to organize a massive CSMC crusade rally at St. Xavier College in Chicago. He represented the Passionist congregation. "Details Arranged by Clergy for Crusade Rally and Mass at St. Xavier Campus," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 27, 1927, 26.
- ²²⁹ "Knights of Columbus," *The Catholic Telegraph*, March 24, 1927, 2.
- ²³⁰ "Record Medical Mission Class Finishes Course; Nine Religious Orders Represented in Group of 32 U.S. Religious Who will Now Scatter to Many Foreign Fields—Course Trebled in Length," *The Catholic Advance*, August 4, 1928, 1.
- ²³¹ Carbonneau, "Life, Death, and Memory," 107.
- ²³² "Three Priests To Leave for China Missions Sunday," *The Catholic Telegraph*, September 6, 1928, 1.
- ²³³ Ibid.
- ²³⁴ Carbonneau, "Life, Death, and Memory," 215.
- ²³⁵ Father Walter Coveyou, "An Aerial Ride in China," *The Sign* 8, no. 8 (March 1929), 509.
- ²³⁶ Letter from Father Walter Coveyou to Ray & Mamie Coveyou, Chenzhou, China, February 13, 1929, Coveyou Family Archives.
- ²³⁷ Carbonneau, "Life, Death, and Memory," 216.
- ²³⁸ Flaherty, "Walter Coveyou, C.P.," 52-53.
- ²³⁹ Father Silvan Latour, C.P., "At the Rainbow's End Where the Treasures Are More Precious Than Gold," *The Sign* 8, no. 11 (June 1929), 672c.
- ²⁴⁰ Father Ochsenreiter proposed two retreats per year. The first event would involve senior missionaries of the north and south. The second would involve junior missionaries of the north and south. Next year, the seniors of the north and juniors of the south would meet, followed by the juniors of the north and the seniors of the south. Within the course of two years, each father would meet each of his brethren in the field. Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 207.
- ²⁴¹ Ibid.
- ²⁴² Ibid., 209.
- ²⁴³ Ibid.
- ²⁴⁴ Father Dunstan Thomas, "Liu Lin Ts'a," *The Sign* 9, no. 1 (August 1929), 57.
- ²⁴⁵ Schneiders, "Fr. Constantine Leech, C.P.," 763.
- ²⁴⁶ "Announcements. Death Notices. Leech," *The Pittsburgh Press*, January 4, 1929, 42.
- ²⁴⁷ "Transmission," occurring at the website: "Cholera," Wikipedia, last modified August 9, 2018, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cholera>.
- ²⁴⁸ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 210.
- ²⁴⁹ Primary sources identify the name of this village as "Hwa Chiao."
- ²⁵⁰ Father Theophane Maguire, "From Chenki [Chenxi] They Went to Death," *The Sign* 10, no. 9 (April 1931), 570-571.
- ²⁵¹ Father Dunstan Thomas, "Liu Lin Ts'a," loc. cit.
- ²⁵² Letter from Father Francis Flaherty to Mrs. Quinn, Chenzhou, China (June 2, 1929), Scrapbook of Sister M. Hildegard, in possession of Mary and Margaret Quinn, Cockeysville, Maryland [hereinafter Scrapbook H].
- ²⁵³ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 210. A detailed description of the party is provided by Father Anthony Maloney, "Our Three American Martyrs," *The Sign* 8, no. 12 (July 1929), 758.
- ²⁵⁴ Maloney, "Our Three American Martyrs," 755-756.
- ²⁵⁵ As to the name of the proprietors of the inn, primary sources use the Wade-Giles spelling "Nieh."
- ²⁵⁶ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 211.
- ²⁵⁷ Maloney, "Our Three American Martyrs," 757.
- ²⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁵⁹ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 211.
- ²⁶⁰ Maloney, "Our Three American Martyrs," 757.
- ²⁶¹ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 212.
- ²⁶² Maloney, "Our Three American Martyrs," 757.
- ²⁶³ Ibid., 757-758.
- ²⁶⁴ Ibid. In primary sources, the name of the bandit leader is listed in Wade-Giles notation, "Nieh Lien Chang." He is related to Madame Nie, wife of the innkeeper at Huajiao.
- ²⁶⁵ Thomas, "Liu Lin Ts'a."
- ²⁶⁶ Maloney, "Our Three American Martyrs," 760.
- ²⁶⁷ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 213.
- ²⁶⁸ The distance between Huajiao and the location of the murders is stated by Maloney, "Our Three American Martyrs," 756.
- ²⁶⁹ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 216.
- ²⁷⁰ This account of the murders of Fathers Walter, Clement, and Godfrey was learned from eyewitness "Peter" Hwang Tien I. Maloney, "Our Three American Martyrs," 759.
- ²⁷¹ Ibid.
- ²⁷² Ibid., 760.
- ²⁷³ Ibid.
- ²⁷⁴ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 215.
- ²⁷⁵ Maloney, "Our Three American Martyrs," 756-757.
- ²⁷⁶ Fr. Theophane Maguire, "From Chenki [Chenxi] They Went to Death," op. cit, 571. The telegram was likely authored by Fr. Agatho Purtill. Another source — Caulfield's book, *Only a Beginning*, 216 — reports a slightly different message by Agatho Purtill: "CONSTANTINE DYING OF TYPHOID AT YONGSHUN — AGATHO."
- ²⁷⁷ Schneiders, "Father Constantine Leech, C.P.," 763.
- ²⁷⁸ Schneiders, "One Thing After Another," *The Sign* 9, no. 2 (September 1929), 123.
- ²⁷⁹ Schneiders, "Father Constantine Leech, C.P.," 764.
- ²⁸⁰ "Signs and Symptoms," appearing at "Typhoid," Wikipedia, last modified August 17, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Typhoid_fever.
- ²⁸¹ Schneiders, "Father Constantine Leech, C.P.," 765.
- ²⁸² Schneiders, "One Thing After Another," 765.
- ²⁸³ Maloney, "Our Three American Martyrs," 760.
- ²⁸⁴ Flaherty, "Father Walter Coveyou, C.P.," 53.
- ²⁸⁵ Langenbacher, "Father Clement Seybold, C.P.," 119.
- ²⁸⁶ Father Robert Carbonneau, C.P., "Resurrecting the Dead: Memorial Gravesites and Faith Stories of Twentieth-Century Catholic Missionaries and Laity in West Hunan, China," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 24, no. 3 (Summer 2006), 25-26.
- ²⁸⁷ Carbonneau, "Life, Death, and Memory," 233-234.
- ²⁸⁸ Letter from Father William Westhoven to Father Stanislaus Grennan, Chenzhou, China, April 27, 1929, Condolences, PHAC.
- ²⁸⁹ Francis P. Lockhart to Secretary of State, April 27, 1929, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., Record Group

- 59 393.1123 Coveyou/Walter.
- ²⁹⁰ Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 217.
- ²⁹¹ A profile of Chinese Nationalist Guomindang general He Jian is available at the website: "He Jian," Wikipedia, last modified July 9, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/He_Jian.
- ²⁹² A list of accomplices and their fates is documented in *Ibid.*, 219.
- ²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 227.
- ²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 218.
- ²⁹⁵ Letter from Father William Westhoven to Father Sebastian Ochsenreiter, Chenzhou, China, May 21, 1929, File/Untitled MC/1929, PHAC.
- ²⁹⁶ Maguire, *Hunan Harvest*, 181.
- ²⁹⁷ Letter from Father Jordan Black to Br. Lambert Budde, Union City, NJ, November 17, 1929, File/Black MC/1929, PHAC.
- ²⁹⁸ Letter from Father Paul Ubinger to Mrs. Mary E. Holbein, Chenzhou, China, July 26, 1929, Scrapbook H.
- ²⁹⁹ Father Robert Carbonneau provides comprehensive coverage of grief and perceptions of martyrdom on behalf of friends and family of the slain missionaries, and of the Passionists, in "Life, Death, and Memory," 303-319.
- ³⁰⁰ Father Robert Carbonneau, taped interview with Mary O'Brien, Baltimore, MD (March 25, 1989), CPA.
- ³⁰¹ Father Robert Carbonneau, taped interview with Mrs. Myrtle Holbein, Catonsville, MD (July 30, 1988), CPA.
- ³⁰² Father Robert Carbonneau, taped interview with Stephen Paul Kenney, West Hartford, CT (June 2, 1988), CPA.
- ³⁰³ Father Robert Carbonneau, taped interview with Joe Klinn, Dunkirk, NY (October 6, 1989), CPA.
- ³⁰⁴ Father Robert Carbonneau, taped interview with Sister James Ellen Woolsey, OSF, Petoskey, MI (July 4, 1989), CPA.
- ³⁰⁵ Father Robert Carbonneau, taped interview with Beatrice Henshaw, Harbor Springs, MI (July, 6, 1989), CPA.
- ³⁰⁶ An article in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* described the mission of the Guild as follows: "The Father Walter Guild was organized in 1929 and perpetuates the memory of Father Walter Coveyou, C.P., a young Passionist Missionary who was killed by Chinese bandits." "Groups Aid Annual Party of Father Walter Guild," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 30, 1948, 17.
- ³⁰⁷ The Guild's last recorded activity in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* occurred in May 1948, when officers of Catholic women's auxiliary and philanthropic societies promised to send delegations to the annual Father Walter Guild party at The Hotel Gibson in Cincinnati, Ohio. The end of activity coincided with the time period in which the Communists rose to power in China and expelled the Passionist missionaries. Presumably, the Guild disbanded at that point. *Ibid.*
- ³⁰⁸ "Guild Awaits Address by Bishop from China," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, December 12, 1935, 8.
- ³⁰⁹ On May 28, 1934, the Prefecture Apostolic of Chenzhou, where the Passionists had been working, was elevated to a vicariate apostolic. On that same day, Father Cuthbert O'Gara was appointed as vicar apostolic, and on October 28, he was ordained a bishop. In December of that year, the vicariate's name was changed from Chenzhou to Yuanling. The prefecture apostolic's elevation to a vicariate apostolic and the name change to Yuanling appear at "Roman Catholic Diocese of Yuanling," last modified February 9, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Catholic_Diocese_of_Yuanling.
- ³¹⁰ In his dissertation, Father Robert Carbonneau provides an in-depth evaluation of Father Caspar Caulfield's thesis. Carbonneau, "Life, Death, and Memory," 229-233. Father Caspar Caulfield devotes several pages in Caulfield, *Only a Beginning*, 227-233, to this thesis.
- ³¹¹ A profile of Chinese general, warlord, and Communist leader Zhu De appears at the website: "Zhu De," Wikipedia, last modified July 24, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zhu_De. A profile of early Chinese Communist leader Li Lisan appears at the website: "Li Lisan," Wikipedia, last modified August 4, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li_Lisan.
- ³¹² Details about Wuhan appear at the website: "Wuhan," last modified August 22, 2018, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wuhan>.
- ³¹³ Carbonneau provides a detailed explanation for this theory in "Life, Death, and Memory," 295-298.
- ³¹⁴ Chen Quzhen's assistance to the Passionists is documented in *The Sign*. In one case at Baojing [Paotsing], he assisted Father Raphael Vance as he was boycotted and threatened for buying a piece of property adjacent to his mission. Father Raphael Vance, C.P., "Letter From Paotsing [Baojing]," *The Sign* 4, no. 12 (July 1925), 521. In another instance, Father Cuthbert O'Gara referred to "General Tsen Yu Mou" providing defense of Chenzhou against the Cantonese [Nationalists] during a display of anti-imperialist and anti-foreign hostility: "Had he not been in the city we would now be either dead or in flight and the Missions in ruins." Editor, "The Mission Situation in China As Reflected in Letters of the Missionaries," *The Sign* 6, no. 10 (May 1927), 629. A letter composed by Chen Quzhen appeared in "Tzen Twen Tzen," *The Sign* 7, no. 1 (August 1927), 2. In another instance, he personally stood behind Catholics who were entering a new Passionist mission in Fenghuang [Fengwhang]. Father Raphael Vance, C.P., "A Trip to Fengwhang Mission," *The Sign* 8, no. 6 (January 1929), 376-79. Regarding references to "Tsen Yu Mou," historians Jeffrey C. Kinkley and Father Caspar Caulfield point to Chen Quzhen being referred to by other names. See Caulfield, "Only a Beginning," 286. See also Jeffrey C. Kinkley, "Shen Ts'ung Wen's Vision of Republican China" (Ph.D. Diss., Harvard University, 1977), 526. An article in *The Sign* describes a Chinese Catholic General Paul Tsen Hung Hai, who Kinkley believes is Chen Quzhen: Father Rupert Langenbacher, "A Catholic Chinese General," *The Sign* 5, no. 1 (August 1925), 39.
- ³¹⁵ Jeffrey C. Kinkley, *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1987), 62-64.
- ³¹⁶ Carbonneau, "Life, Death, and Memory," 295-296.
- ³¹⁷ Carbonneau provides a comprehensive overview of reaction from the secular press, Catholic periodicals, hometown press, and the international Passionist reaction in "Life, Death, and Memory," 340-374.
- ³¹⁸ Father Harold Purcell, "In His Steps," *The Sign* 8, no. 11 (June 1929), 642.
- ³¹⁹ Father Basil Bauer, "Back and Forth," *The Sign* 9, no. 3 (October 1929), 181.
- ³²⁰ Schneiders, "Father Constantine Leech, C.P., A Martyr to Duty," 369-379.
- ³²¹ Gilbert Love, "Dying Priest Travels Mountain Trail Three Days," *The Pittsburgh Press*, April 25, 1931, 6.
- ³²² Passionist priests given jail sentences included Bishop Cuthbert O'Gara of Yuanling, Father Paul Ubinger, Father Harold Traverse, Father Marcellus White, and Father Justin Garvey. "Chinese Reds Jail Passionist Priest," *The Pittsburgh Catholic*, July 3, 1952, 6.
- ³²³ The last two Passionists expelled from Hunan were Father Marcellus White and Father Justin Garvey. They crossed out of Chinese territory on November 19, 1955. Sister Mary Carita Pendergast, S.C., *Havoc in Hunan: the Sisters of Charity in Western Hunan 1924-1951* (Morristown, NJ: College of Saint Elizabeth Press, 1991), 232.
- ³²⁴ The seventeen missionaries buried in Yuanling, China are as follows:
- Nine Passionist priests from the USA: Father Edmund Campbell (April 13, 1925); Fathers Walter Coveyou, Godfrey Holbein, and Clement Seybold (all April 24, 1929); Father Constantine Leech (April 25, 1929); Father Edward Joseph McCarthy (August 12, 1939); Father Justin Moore (May 10, 1936); Father Flavian Mullins (June 18, 1939); and Father Denis Mary Fogarty (June 12, 1944).
 - Two Sisters of Charity from China: Sister Mary Joseph Chang, S.C. (April 25, 1939), and Sister Marie Therese Tuan, S.C. (May 18, 1944).
 - Three Sisters of Charity from the USA: Sister Marie Devota Ross, S.C. (July 29, 1932); Sister Maria Electa McDermott, S.C. (March 12, 1941), and Sister Catherine Gabriel Whittaker, S.C. (July 8, 1941).
 - Also buried here are Sister Marie Sebastian Curley, S.C., from Ireland (August 8, 1950); Sister Mary Daniel O'Connor, C.S.I.C., from Canada (May 10, 1943), and Miss Ilse R. Lauder, M.D., from Germany (August 1933). Carbonneau, "Resurrecting the Dead," 21. Not included in this listing is American Sister of St. Joseph of Baden Sister Clarissa Statmiller, S.S.J., who died of malaria on July 21, 1926.
- ³²⁵ In 2004, Yuanling town officials decided to build a new road through the old Catholic missionary graveyard, prompting the reburial of their remains. Carbonneau, "Resurrecting the Dead," 1-2.
- ³²⁶ *Celebrating 150 Years of Passionist Ministry*, 39.