

The Department of External Affairs and the Release of Bishop O'Gara from Chinese Prison, 1951-1953

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On 8 March 1953, Passionist Father Linus Lombard was summoned to the local headquarters of the Communist Party Bureau of Public Safety, Yuanling, Hunan, China, a small river town in western Hunan. American Passionist priests and Sisters of Charity had been missionaries there since the 1920s.¹ Communist officials informed Lombard that Canadian-born Passionist Bishop Cuthbert O'Gara, a prisoner of the Communists for twenty months, was sick in the Yuanling Peoples Hospital.² The local Communists ordered Father Lombard to bring food to the Bishop on a daily basis.

Lombard, a twenty-year United States' missionary to China, began peppering the bureaucrats with questions. How was the Bishop's health? What food could he eat? He was told O'Gara "is sick, bring the food and sign a paper that you will not put poison in his food and that it will be well prepared." Lombard interpreted the concern as a call for help from the Bureau of Public Safety and a signal to discuss the release of the Bishop from prison. Almost two months later, on 26 April 1953, Bishop O'Gara crossed into Hong Kong and freedom.

Based upon O'Gara's file in the National Archives of Canada, this paper explores the initiatives of the Canadian Department of External Affairs to

¹ For information on the Passionists see Robert Carbonneau, C.P., "The Passionists in China, 1921-1929: An Essay in Mission Experience," *The Catholic Historical Review* 66 (1980): pp. 392-415; and "Life, Death and Memory: Three Passionists in Hunan, China and the Shaping of An American Mission Perspective in the 1920s," (Ph.D. diss. Georgetown, 1992); as well as "The Passionists in Twentieth-century China: Politics and Mission," in Jeroom Heyndrickx, C.I.C.M., editor, *Historiography of the Chinese Catholic Church: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation, K.U. Leuven, 1994): 76-85. See also Caspar Caulfield, C.P., *Only A Beginning: The Passionists in China, 1921-1931*. (Union City, NJ: Passionist Press, 1990). For information on the Sisters of Charity see Sister Mary Carita Pendergast, S.C., *Havoc in Hunan: The Sisters of Charity in Western Hunan 1924-1951* (Morristown, NJ: College of St. Elizabeth Press, 1991).

² Originally built by the Passionists in the mid 1940s, it was taken over by the Communists in the early 1950s.

secure the release of Bishop O’Gara from Chinese prison in 1953 after being arrested in 1951. O’Gara’s release provides insight into the delicate situation of Canadian-Chinese relations during the Korean War. In particular, the case provides a means of appreciating the activities of the Department of External Affairs to gain freedom for a Canadian citizen who was a Catholic missionary. Solving this human and Church problem required a measured, circumspect approach in informing the public about the ongoing negotiations. It is indicative of the style of quiet diplomacy which later became associated with Lester B. Pearson, who served as Secretary of State of External Affairs at the time of O’Gara’s release.

Over the ensuing years the Bishop rarely mentioned the work of Canadian diplomats in obtaining his freedom. Thus, the general public has lacked complete understanding of this event in Canadian-Chinese relations and the history of Catholic missionary involvement in twentieth-century China.

Canadians Learn about Bishop O’Gara’s Arrest

On 3 July 1951, External Affairs in Ottawa learned of O’Gara’s arrest in China via a courtesy phone call by John Thompson, editor of *The Ensign*. While ready to run the story in *The Ensign*, Thompson respected Pearson’s reply, which warned about the safety of Canadians imprisoned in China. The Canadian press should “refrain from castigation of the Chinese government.” Even so, Thompson wondered “whether the time had not come to open up the subject in the press” and how the Canadian government planned to respond?³

Later, in a 28 July editorial “Dangerous Arguments,” *The Ensign* argued that the Canadian government had a “moral obligation” to respond to O’Gara’s arrest even though the latter had technically broken a Chinese law on religion. Readers were reminded that, even without diplomatic relations, Canada had protested the persecution of Cardinal Mindszenty of Hungary. O’Gara’s arrest was seen by *The Ensign* to be part of the larger pattern of world dominance by Stalin and Communist China. The editorial urged Canada to avoid use of British diplomacy and to raise a direct protest because Canadian silence on the arrest was “to relinquish our freedom by default.”⁴

On the contrary, External Affairs assumed a low key, diplomatic approach. On 4 July it requested information on O’Gara from T.R.G.

³ A. Anderson, Memorandum, Press Office, [Ottawa] 3 July 1951. In Rev. Cuthbert O’Gara File: 17 AEV-40; Record Group 25 Vol 2251. National Archives of Canada. Hereafter all correspondence relating to this file will be designated by the initials ONAC. Vatican archives for this period are closed. Examining Chinese archives was beyond the scope of this article.

⁴ ONAC. Editorial, “Dangerous Arguments,” *The Ensign*, 28 July 1951.

Fletcher, Canadian Government Trade Commissioner in Hong Kong,⁵ but received little news. Through his secretary, W.R. Martin, Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent responded to protests on O’Gara’s treatment in China from Passionists in Toronto and other interested parties.⁶ Acting Secretary of State Brooke Claxton on 16 July declared O’Gara’s arrest to be a “shock” and informed the parties protesting on behalf of Bishop O’Gara that the United Kingdom Chargé d’Affaires in Peking had been asked to present O’Gara’s case to the Chinese Foreign Ministry. Claxton counseled patience. Canada, being without diplomatic relations with China, needed British connections.⁷ A British diplomatic protest as to “the nature of the charges” against O’Gara was made on 26 July 1951.⁸

Brooke Claxton, argues David Jay Bercuson, was highly skeptical of Canadian involvement in the Korean War.⁹ Pearson, on the other hand, believed a limited military response in Korea expressed support for the U.N. Denis Stairs maintains that Canada consciously tried to steer a political course distinct from the United States. In sum, External Affairs faced the O’Gara incident in China while it tried to maintain its limited troop presence in Korea, and contribute to the political resolution of the political issues faced by the international community.¹⁰

⁵ ONAC. Secretary of State External Affairs to [Fletcher] Canadian Government Trade Commissioner in Hong Kong, 4 July 1951; response of Office of Trade Commissioner to Ottawa, 5 July 1951.

⁶ ONAC. Rev. Crispin Lynch, C.P. to St. Laurent, Toronto 4 July 1951. telegram; W.R. Martin to Lynch, Ottawa, 5 July 1951; Another protest was Mrs. Sarah Griffin to St. Laurent, Willowdale, 8 July, 1951; Martin to Griffin, Ottawa, 11 July 1951; Miss Marie Besco to St. Laurent, York Mills, Ontario [? July 1951]; Martin to Besco, Ottawa, 25 July 1951. For information on Martin see Paul Martin, Chap. V., “Living with the Titans,” *A Very Public Life: Volume II So Many Worlds* (Toronto: Deneau, 1985), pp. 140-77.

⁷ ONAC. Brooke Claxton to Father Lynch, Ottawa, 16 July 1951. This was a more direct response to the 4 July telegram which Lynch had sent to St. Laurent; Under Secretary of State A.J. Hicks to Griffin, Ottawa, 30 July 1951 and same to Besco provided essentially the same information.

⁸ ONAC. Charge D’Affaires to Mr. Huan Hsiang, West European and African Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, 26 July 1951, Peking.

⁹ David Jay Bercuson, *True Patriot: The Life of Brooke Claxton, 1898-1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. 175-267. For Claxton’s Asian view, see p. 211. For additional background on Canadian diplomacy in this era see J.L. Granatstein, *The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins, 1935-1957* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1982); Escott Reid, *Radical Mandarin: The Memoirs of Escott Reid* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).

¹⁰ Denis Stairs, *The Diplomacy of Constraint: Canada, the Korean War*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1974). John Hilker and Donald Barry, *Canada’s Department of External Affairs Vol II: Coming of Age, 1946-1968* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995) is an excellent analysis of the Department during the period under study in this paper.

The Charges: Bishop O’Gara as Imperialist

Son of Judge Martin O’Gara and Margaret Bowes of Ottawa,¹¹ the Bishop had been a Passionist missionary to western Hunan since 1924. Possessing a kind of patrician-mandarin personality, he relished liturgical ceremony while at the same time caring deeply for Chinese refugees who spilled into western Hunan in the 1930s and 1940s. In December 1941, O’Gara was imprisoned in Hong Kong by the Japanese.¹² He was an experienced missionary whose survival in western Hunan was effected by a balancing act among regional warlords, local bandits, United States military, the Nationalist government, and the Chinese Communists. There was anxiety when the Communists arrived in Yuanling, Hunan in September 1949. Yet, in another sense this was just part of the social and political life which was so common in western Hunan.

Analysis of the systematic process by which the Communists took control of Yuanling is beyond the scope of this paper. In short, once in control, the Communists cast Bishop O’Gara as a “reactionary and imperialist.” The Bishop was seen as an agent of the west, a subversive whose prior relationships with the United States military, the Nationalist government, and Vatican made him a political threat. His presence, in the eyes of the Chinese Communists, was evil.

However, not until O’Gara’s April 1953 release did Canadian officials receive any official description of the charges against the Bishop. “Ever since he came to China in 1924,” stated the 28 April edition of *Hsin Hunan Pao*, Changsha, Hunan,

O’Gara, Bishop of Yuanling Area, has always assumed an antagonistic manner against the patriotic movement of the Chinese people. Early in 1943, he began to establish intelligence relations with the “Office of Strategic Services” of the American Government to Kunming, provincial capital of Yunnan. In April 1945, he went to Chungking to meet the bandit chief Chiang Kai-shek for anti-Communist activities. Two years later, he again flew to Peking from West Hunan to make a report to [General] Wedemayer and other American agents on conditions in West Hunan Province.

After the liberation of West Hunan, the accused has, in the name of preaching, instructed all imperialistic elements in the catholic churches in

¹¹ See O’Gara, Martin, in Geo. Maclean Rose, editor. *A Cyclopedia of Canadian Biography Being Chiefly Men of the Time Series I* (Toronto: Rose Publishing Company, 1886), pp. 365-6.

¹² A small portion of the correspondence in ONAC which refers to this incident. For more background on O’Gara see Robert Carbonneau, “Bishop Cuthbert O’Gara, C.P., D.D.: Twentieth Century Missionary in Hunan, China,” *The Passionist* 29 (1995): pp. 1-19.

West Hunan to collect military, political, economic and cultural informations [sic] for him and secretly set up [a] wireless station for supplying informations [sic] to the espionage organs of the American Government. He also communicated with the remnant Kuomintang bandits in Taiwan by wireless in an attempt to incite an armed insurrection and occupy the airfield of Chihkiang, West Hunan.¹³

In many respects *The Ensign* and *Hsin Hunan Pao* employed the same world-wide conspiracy arguments. Evil ideological forces threatened daily life and existence in western and communist societies. To the Chinese, O’Gara’s Canadian citizenship was incidental. It was O’Gara’s citizenship in a country within the democratic western orbit which was the crime.

Prisoners, Politicians, and Politics

In late August, 1951 Under Secretary of State A.D.P. Heeney updated Kathleen Garvey on her brother the Bishop. Heeney confirmed the Bishop was arrested as “[a]n adherent of capitalism and imperialism,” and shared with her a 27 July letter from Father Lombard concerning the well-being of the Bishop. At the same time, Heeney admitted the difficulty “to get information regarding persons in the interior of China” and indicated that Canada looked to the United Kingdom Chargé d’Affaires to solve the crisis.¹⁴

Another political perspective on the O’Gara vigil was offered in response to Reverend Athol Murray of Wilcox, Saskatchewan on 17 September. Heeney explained that O’Gara was arrested “following his action in excommunicating ... members of his church who had signed a petition requesting the Peking Government to deport the Papal Internuncio from China.” While poor treatment of O’Gara by the Chinese Communists may have been occasioned by his U.S.-Passionist links, the Canadian government “left no question” about the Bishop’s Canadian citizenship. In the end Murray was notified that since April 1951 “the position of foreign nationals” in China had in fact “deteriorated,” but that news of O’Gara via Father Lombard “is not too discouraging.”¹⁵

Privately, Heeney in an internal six point Memorandum, circulated on 29 September, and summarized below, informed External Affairs that: 1) Peking had not responded to the 1 September U.K. inquiry. 2) That missionary humiliation was part of a larger policy of the Chinese against the

¹³ ONAC. 28 April 1953, *Hsin Hunan Pao*, [New Hunan Newspaper] Changsha, Hunan, translation. Copy of paper in J.M. Addis, Foreign Office, S.W.I. to H.R. St. J. Home, Esq. Canada House, S.W.I. 13 July 1953.

¹⁴ ONAC. Heeney to O’Gara, August 29, 1951 [Ottawa].

¹⁵ ONAC. Heeney to Murray, 15 September 1951, Ottawa. Seen by L.B. Pearson.

“‘corrupting influence’ of Western missionaries.” Such, “fantastic charges” once “having served their purpose” would, wrote Heeneey, result in “the relatively mild punishment of deportation.” 3) There have been no serious reports of “serious mistreatment” of missionaries who were “receiving somewhat better treatment than would ordinary Chinese prisoners.” 4) Five Sisters of the Immaculate Conception were detained in Canton, O’Gara was in jail in Yuanling, Dr. Stewart Allen of the United Church Foreign Mission Board had been moved to a jail in Chungking and might soon be deported. 5) The China Inland Mission “suggested it would be unwise to give the matter” of the arrest in Szechwan of Canadian Rev. Donald A. Cunningham any “publicity or to make any protest.” 6) Heeneey promised to keep the Minister “informed of developments regarding the welfare of Canadians in China.”¹⁶

This memorandum was used in a 4 October press conference¹⁷ and appears to have served as the basis for a 29 September response of Lester Pearson to numerous issues raised by Reverend Mother St. Clare of Loretto Abbey, Toronto in a 27 August letter which was originally sent to Mr. Paul Martin.¹⁸ Pearson, after being shown the letter by the former, responded in a four-page letter. He offered a summary of Canadian foreign policy human rights concerns in 1951. First to be addressed was the issue of European mass deportations, particularly in Hungary. Pearson wrote how protests made “directly to the Hungarian Government or indirectly through the United Nations have produced no change in attitude of the Hungarian regime.” He then reminded her of the unsuccessful 1949 “formal protest” against the arrest of Cardinal Mindszenty as well as the subsequent failure of a joint U.K.-U.S. protest against human rights violations and freedom of religion in Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria.

Stating that it was “regrettable” that stronger U.N. enforcement against Soviet satellite violations could be pursued, Pearson cautioned that “repeated protests of the Western world might merely incite” the Communists to take

¹⁶ ONAC. A.D.P.H., “Memorandum For The Minister: Canadians in China,” Confidential 29 September 1951.

¹⁷ ONAC. “Memorandum For Mr. Chance (Consular Division) Canadians in China,”: Press Office: A.C. Anderson 4 October 1951: “I believe you will be interested to know that the suggestion made in your memorandum of October 3 for the Minister’s press conference today evidently met with the Minister’s approval. When he was asked a question on the general subject, he looked at the memorandum, gave the information about Bishop O’Gara and then, glancing over paragraph 2, added a remark to the effect that the information we were getting led us to believe that missionaries are not being seriously mistreated.”

¹⁸ ONAC. Pearson to Reverend Mother St. Clare, Ottawa, 29 September 1951. The original letter of Clare to Martin is not in the file. What follows in the text is Pearson’s response.

“repressive measures” against those in need of assistance. Nevertheless, Pearson affirmed attention to the issue would not diminish.

Next Pearson addressed the issue of Bishop O’Gara. He told her initial and more recent requests through U.K. diplomats on 1 September (made public on 10 September) produced “little information.” In fact, O’Gara’s case was part of a larger issue. The “dilemma,” said Pearson was:

On the one hand, we are deeply concerned about the treatment accorded to Canadians in China; on the other hand, there is the risk that even harsher treatment will be inflicted on them if world-wide condemnation is called down upon the heads of the Chinese Communists. Meanwhile the problem continues to be very much in our minds.

Pearson then went on to make the point that China would gain recognition only when “it abandons its unprovoked and unwarranted aggression in Korea.... In other words, the Peking regime simply cannot shoot its way into the United Nations” and that Canada had never voted to allow China a seat.

Finally, Pearson concluded the letter with a comment on Spain. Canada, rather than being allied with the U.K. and France in opposition to establishing a link between Spain and western powers had “not been required to take a stand.” He concluded that “despite certain reservations regarding the nature of the Franco regime, we supported all measures aiming at the regularization of relations between Spain and the United Nations member states.”¹⁹

The above letter indicates that Canada, in 1951, was pursuing a measured policy towards China. Publicity was not desired. In fact, the tone of the letter suggests that the desired tack of Canada was to be steady, collaborative and more quiet, rather than boisterous and forthright.

The Release

On 10 March 1953, Father Lombard wrote Sir Lionel Lamb, British Chargé d’Affaires in Peking, that Bishop O’Gara was in a new situation with his captors. Father Lombard wrote how he had received “a hint, dropped in speaking with one of the officials ... that the doctors ‘are not sure what sickness the Bishop has at this time.’” In addition Lombard had learned that the local police were looking for direction from “some higher office or official.” Reliable word was the Bishop had been hospitalized since 14 February. Politically astute and knowing the Chinese mind, he went on to encourage British officials to send a telegram to the Yuanling Bureau of Public Safety and “to use your good graces ... to effect the Bishop’s

¹⁹ ONAC. Ibid.

release.”²⁰ Given the fact that Maryknoll Bishop Ford had died in a Communist prison in early 1952, it appeared that the Chinese did not desire that another foreign religious Bishop die in prison.

Diplomatic initiatives commenced. By 26 March 1953, External Affairs of Canada had received a summary of O’Gara’s new situation from Lamb in Peking; the latter went on to inform the Secretary of State that he was making a representation to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, an action endorsed on 27 March. The next day, External Affairs telephoned Bishop O’Gara’s sister in Canada to notify her of her brother’s “illness without going into details.”²¹

The Press and the Politicians

The Canadian press now began to follow the O’Gara story. “Concerned Over Safety Of Ottawa-Born Bishop” was the 11 April 1953 headline of the *Ottawa Citizen*. Readers were told that Hong Kong officials were trying to locate O’Gara’s whereabouts since he had been placed in transit to Hong Kong since 21 March. The *Ottawa Journal*, *Toronto Star*, and *Montreal Star* also ran shorter stories that same day about the inability to locate the Bishop. On 13 April the *Toronto Globe and Mail* carried his picture and stated he was “overdue on his return to Hong Kong.” Hope probably increased in Ottawa, when, on the same day, the *Ottawa Citizen* headlined that Passionists in New Jersey “Feel ‘Optimistic’ About Bishop O’Gara’s Situation.”

As public expectations increased, an 18 April cable from The High Commissioner for Canada in London noted that as of 15 April Sir Lionel Lamb had not received notification of O’Gara’s release. Diplomatic communication was limited at best and transportation across China was never dependable.

As diplomats tried to find the Bishop, Mr. W.J. Browne (St. John’s West) on 13 April exerted pressure on External Affairs to provide more information about him. Mr. Claxton responded that they were still trying to “ascertain the present whereabouts of Bishop O’Gara.”²²

Later, a restricted 22 April memorandum to the Acting Minister and Acting Under-Secretary provided contextual background on the O’Gara

²⁰ ONAC. Lombard to Lamb, Yuanling, 10 March 1953.

²¹ ONAC. High Commissioner for Canada, London to Secretary of State for External Affairs, Canada, 26 March 1953. Includes text of 23 March telegram from Lamb to High Commissioner in London and cites 28 March telephone memo to Miss O’Gara.

²² ONAC. Consular/Hector Allard to Acting Minister/Acting Under-Secretary, 22 April 1953. Note on Claxton comment is indicated in P.S. It points out that it was in *Hansard*, 13 April 1953: 3746.

release. Point five of the memo indicated that the whole incident was part of an increased effort to effect prisoner exchanges. “In view of the successful negotiations which the British authorities have concluded with Russia for the release of civilians in North Korea,” the Canadian appeal for O’Gara’s release appeared opportune. If proven successful, External Affairs looked to the release of “6 other Canadian missionaries held prisoners in China and for the freedom of 7 others held under house arrest.” While the Chargé d’Affaires in the United Kingdom had “produced no results, in view of the present attitude of the Communist authorities in Moscow and elsewhere there seems to be no reason why our efforts on behalf of these Canadian missionaries in China should not be released to the public.” Their release, assumed the diplomats, would be “unlikely” to influence “treatment of those missionaries still held as prisoners or under house arrest.”²³

Finally on 26 April, Commissioner Fletcher in Hong Kong notified the Secretary of State for External Affairs in Canada that Bishop O’Gara had arrived in Hong Kong. He was “weak but rest and care expected to bring about quick recuperation.” However, a 27 April “Confidential” External Affairs Memorandum for the Acting Minister prepared by C.S.A. Ritchie indicates that the release of Bishop O’Gara was on the one hand an opportunity for public rejoicing, and on the other hand, necessitated caution. Ritchie informed the Acting Minister that the Browne question concerning O’Gara’s whereabouts could be answered publicly in the affirmative, and that Fletcher, in Hong Kong “expects to be able to visit Bishop O’Gara shortly and will then submit a written report.” But Ritchie also stressed the need for confidentiality:

We have now been advised by the United Kingdom Chargé d’Affaires ... that he made a written representation to the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs on April 21, 1953 on behalf of Commonwealth and United States citizens held in detention in Communist China. He has “requested that until a further report can be made on this action, no public statements be made on this subject.”²⁴

The 30 June 1951 arrest of O’Gara had occurred a little over a year after the 25 June 1950 start of the Korean War. The External Affairs file and other sources suggest that his crime was that the Chinese believed that because of his western and Christian missionary affiliation he was ipso facto as impe-

²³ ONAC. Ibid., point 5 of 22 April 1953 restricted memo noted above.

²⁴ ONAC. C.S.A. Ritchie to Acting Minister, Ottawa, April 27, 1953. For background on Ritchie see Charles Ritchie, *Diplomatic Passport: More Undiplomatic Diaries, 1946-1962* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1981).

rialist.²⁵ His release almost two years later may be viewed as part of a larger diplomatic chess game between the United States, the United Kingdom, China, Korea, and the Soviet Union. Each nation was in the midst of attempting to secure its best ideological and military position in post-war Asia.

More directly, the O’Gara case provides a glimpse of Canadian-Chinese relations during the Korean War era. Reg Whitaker and Gary Marcuse have shown that Canada was, simply put, in a kind of Cold War remission in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Canadian domestic issues were intimately linked to foreign policy issues. While Canada was an active participant in the United Nations and NATO in the late 1940s and the Asian-based Colombo Plan to aid South and Southeast Asia in the early 1950s, the police action in Korea tested these political relationships. In June 1950 and by mid-July 1951, Canada had a low level but highly symbolic involvement in Korea by sending some of its troops.²⁶

In his fine study of Canadian involvement during the Korean War, Denis Stairs shows that Lester Pearson believed that “politics is concerned with the resolution of conflict.” Displeasure with Chinese conduct did not mean, Stairs argues, that Pearson would refuse to negotiate; in fact Pearson preferred the “multilateral arena.” As the chief architect of policy in External Affairs, Pearson believed that “the bulk of Canada’s diplomacy in the context of the Korean War was concerned with the constraint of American policy” expressed through Pearson’s diplomatic initiatives and independence.²⁷

As far back as the 1930s Pearson had sympathies toward China. Concretely, “Pearson approached China with a Eurocentric vision.” John English suggests that Pearson “[p]rivately ... fretted about the consequences of American obsessions about China and shared the fear of his External Affairs advisers that Americans were too provocative towards China.” Also, Pearson had hoped “the settlement in Korea should have been part of a broader Asian solution, one which would involve the participation of China.”²⁸

²⁵ See *Deposition of Most Rev. Cuthbert M. O’Gara, C.P. to United States State Department March, 1957 concerning Communist Takeover of Yuanling Diocese, Hunan, China*. In Passionist Historical Archives, Union City, New Jersey.

²⁶ Reg Whitaker and Gary Marcuse, *Cold War Canada: The Making of a National Insecurity State, 1945-1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

²⁷ Denis Stairs. Chap. 9. “Analytical Alternatives,” *The Diplomacy of Constraint*, pp. 297-332.

²⁸ John English, Chap. 5, “Lester Pearson and China,” in Paul M. Evans and B. Michael Frolic, editors, *Reluctant Adversaries: Canada and the People’s Republic of China 1949-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp. 133-47. Quotes on pp. 135-7.

Studies by Geoffrey A.H. Pearson and English, respectively, suggest that travelling such a diplomatic path was not easy. The former observes that U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson discussed Korea in terms of a wider Soviet-Chinese conflict which Pearson did not always affirm. English maintains that walking on a balanced diplomatic path rather than pursuing U.S. interventionist ends shaped Pearson's "Becoming Adult."²⁹ In his memoir, *Mike*, Pearson recalled that in January 1951 the United States pressured the U.N. Assembly to condemn Chinese aggression in Korea. Pearson was not pleased by the resolve: "We ourselves remained convinced throughout that negotiations with China should be our objective and condemnation voted only as a last resort."³⁰ The O'Gara case points to a Canadian willingness, through a United Kingdom representative, to seek the Bishop's freedom through less aggressive tactics than condemnation.

Qiang Zhai's study of Chinese-British-American relations between 1949 and 1958 offers a context to appreciate the Canadian-British rapport. The United States saw China and Korea as closely linked. British attitudes were much more conciliatory towards China during the period of the Korean War.³¹ To obtain O'Gara's release, Canadian diplomats, in seeking British assistance, appeared to be more in line with British thinking on China than that of the U.S. State Department.³² And being the consummate diplomat, Pearson could privately pursue these negotiations through Britain, and at the

²⁹ Geoffrey A.H. Pearson, Chap. 5, "The Shock of Korea, 1950," *Seize the Day: Lester B. Pearson and Crisis Diplomacy* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1993), pp. 63-79; John English, Chap. 2, "Becoming Adult," *The Worldly Years: The Life of Lester Pearson. Volume 11: 1949-1972* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 1992), pp. 29-63.

³⁰ John A. Munro and Alex I. Inglis, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson. Volume 2 1948-1957* (New York: Quadrangle, 1973), p. 173. The comment is part of a 9 February 1951 memo Pearson sent to Canadian Ambassador to U.S. Hume Wrong. Later in the report Pearson wrote: "The chances of success of such negotiations, we realize, are slender. Chief among the difficulties, of course, are the fanatic marxist obsessions of Chinese Communist leaders and the excitable state of public opinion in the United States. Nevertheless, it is the task of diplomacy to pursue patiently and doggedly what appears to be the only sensible course." See p. 174.

³¹ Qiang Zhai, *The Dragon, the Lion, and the Eagle: Chinese-British-American Relations, 1949-1958* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1994).

³² The tension between the United States and China during the Korean period is explored in Harry Harding and Yuan Ming, Editors. *Sino-American Relations 1945-1955: A Joint Assessment of a Critical Decade* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Press, 1989), pp. 157-267. Six essays are included in this section which offer U.S. and Chinese perspectives. See also Michael H. Hunt, Chap. 6, "The Trials of Adversity, 1945-1951," *The Genesis of Chinese Communist Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 159-200.

same time express, in a measured manner, Cold War ideology to Mother St. Clare of Toronto.³³

Pearson's reservations about U.S. policy in Korea had been stated on 10 April 1951 at the Empire and Canadian Club in Toronto. Canada's "preoccupation is no longer *whether* the United States will discharge her international responsibilities," he said, "but how she will do it and whether the rest of us will be involved."³⁴ Diplomatic resolve rather than military intervention was simply the preferred route in External Affairs under Lester Pearson. Perhaps the O'Gara case represents such a scenario.

Still, diplomats know that it is wise to take advantage of the situation when opportunity knocks. Luck and timing was no doubt part of the success behind the Bishop's release. Father Lombard has to be credited with the ability to read and act on the Chinese tea leaves before him. The Chinese did not want O'Gara to die. That would have been an embarrassment.

At the same, Canadian diplomats securing the freedom of a Canadian citizen could very well have been a symbolic diplomatic feather in Pearson's cap among the populace at home. The release of Bishop O'Gara from a Chinese Communist prison several months prior to the end of the Korean War on 27 July 1953, probably assisted the domestic Canadian Liberal Party agenda. Because O'Gara's father had been a prominent judge in Ottawa, the release would be likely to receive favourable publicity, and the release of a Roman Catholic Bishop would be appreciated by Canadian Catholics. Even more, O'Gara's release from a Communist China jail had all the symbolism of the triumph of western democracy and good over Communist evil. Diplomacy had served a moral and political purpose.

During a 16 May 1953 speech to the Ontario Liberal Association, Pearson expounded on some of the guiding principles which may have influenced the O'Gara case. "Liberalism," he said, "is the middle way between extremes. But while we are in the middle of the road, we don't stand still. We move – and in the right direction – and I hope we will never slide into the ditches on either side." Later, on 3 January 1954, Pearson stated that diplomacy fostered "quiet and confidential negotiation. ... Too much drama is not always good for discussion or decision." "Diplomacy," concluded Pearson, "is simply the agency for the conduct of official business with other states." And such business required the public to be informed in principle but not "in every step of the negotiation ... especially in dealing with communist states. Our fear of communism," he elaborated, "is understandably so great that if in negotiation we make a concession on any point of detail, and this becomes public as it nearly always does, we may be accused of deserting a

³³ For another image of China in larger issues of Canadian polity see H.F. Angus, *Canada and the Far East* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1953).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

principle or being ‘soft.’”³⁵ The O’Gara case, I suggest, followed these principles.

Paul Evans and Daphne Gottlieb Taras have pointed out that Pearson’s policy was to comment in Parliament on Canadian-Chinese relations only when asked, as for example, when M.P. Browne desired information on Bishop O’Gara. Pearson, the authors conclude, often did not reveal his diplomatic cards to the public. Rather, as head of External Affairs he showed private initiative on China. In effect he “walked a tightrope” on the China issue.³⁶ Perhaps the O’Gara case became part of the balancing act.

The O’Gara case does raise several final thoughts. Charges of imperialism against O’Gara deserve greater reflection, even though such accusations did not merit such harsh treatment by the Chinese Communists. His case is only one of many against missionaries of different nationalities of that era and raises the question as to whether Chinese Communists developed a pattern to their charges, imprisonment, and judgment of missionaries. More research is needed to understand how the western and Communist press capitalized on these events.

Eric O. Hanson’s thesis that the Vatican and China can be viewed as “transnationals” engaged in respective competition with one another may be a means to address this issue. He argues that world Catholicism directed by the Vatican, and world Communism, which assisted in shaping post-World War II Chinese culture, were caught in feelings of mutual fear which became a central guiding principle of understanding and action.³⁷ Further examination of cases involving diplomats of other countries where nationals were missionaries is required to reveal whether they experienced treatment similar to Bishop O’Gara. Perhaps ideological issues surrounding missionary activity in China bore a greater impact on public policy of respective nations with China than has been previously considered.

The O’Gara case raises the larger related, yet unexplored, issue of citizenship and religious evangelization with special regard to Roman Catholics. In this case there appears to be no evidence that the Holy See was involved in negotiating O’Gara’s release. But when the Holy See becomes active in such cases, does such interaction blur the boundaries of citizenship for the

³⁵ Lester B. Pearson, “To the Ontario Liberal Association,” 16 May 1953, pp. 120-3; “International Public Relations,” 5 January 1954, pp. 124-8; in *Words and Occasions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970).

³⁶ Paul Evans & Daphne Gottlieb Taras, “Looking (Far) East: Parliament and Canada-China Relations, 1949-1982,” in David Taras, Editor, *Parliament and Canadian Foreign Policy*. (Toronto: Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1985), pp. 66-100.

³⁷ Eric O. Hanson, *Catholic Politics in China and Korea* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1980).

missionary? Is he or she more a representative of gospel citizenship or national citizenship? Where does allegiance lie?

From 1953 to his death in 1968, Bishop O’Gara travelled throughout the United States, and the world, preaching the gospel of anti-Communism. In late 1953 for instance, he was in Toronto at a rally preaching against Canadian recognition of Communist China.³⁸ I have argued elsewhere that the Bishop exhibited classic symptoms of paranoia against Communism.³⁹ Still, to Catholics and others who heard him, he was a living witness, one who had survived the evils of Communism. Given the frenzy and extravagance of the Cold War, it is ironic that in the public addresses he made during the years prior to his death he rarely informed his listeners about the diplomacy surrounding his release from a Chinese Communist prison. No doubt many would be surprised that it was not due to the dominating presence of the United States as a world power. Rather, the release of Passionist Bishop Cuthbert O’Gara was a result of the steady diplomacy of the Canadian Department of External Affairs and Lester B. Pearson.

³⁸ ONAC. Notation of O’Gara’s presence and speaking to this subject is in “Note on Bishop O’Gara.” It states in part: “a letter from Charles Henry, M.P. for Toronto-Rosedale in November 1953 stated that Bishop O’Gara had been preaching in churches in Mr. Henry’s constituency against Canadian recognition of Communist China.”

³⁹ Robert E. Carbonneau, “It Can Happen Here: Bishop Cuthbert O’Gara, C.P., And The Gospel of Anti-Communism in Cold War America,” paper presented at The Center for the Study of American Religion, 1 December 1995, Princeton University Workshop.