

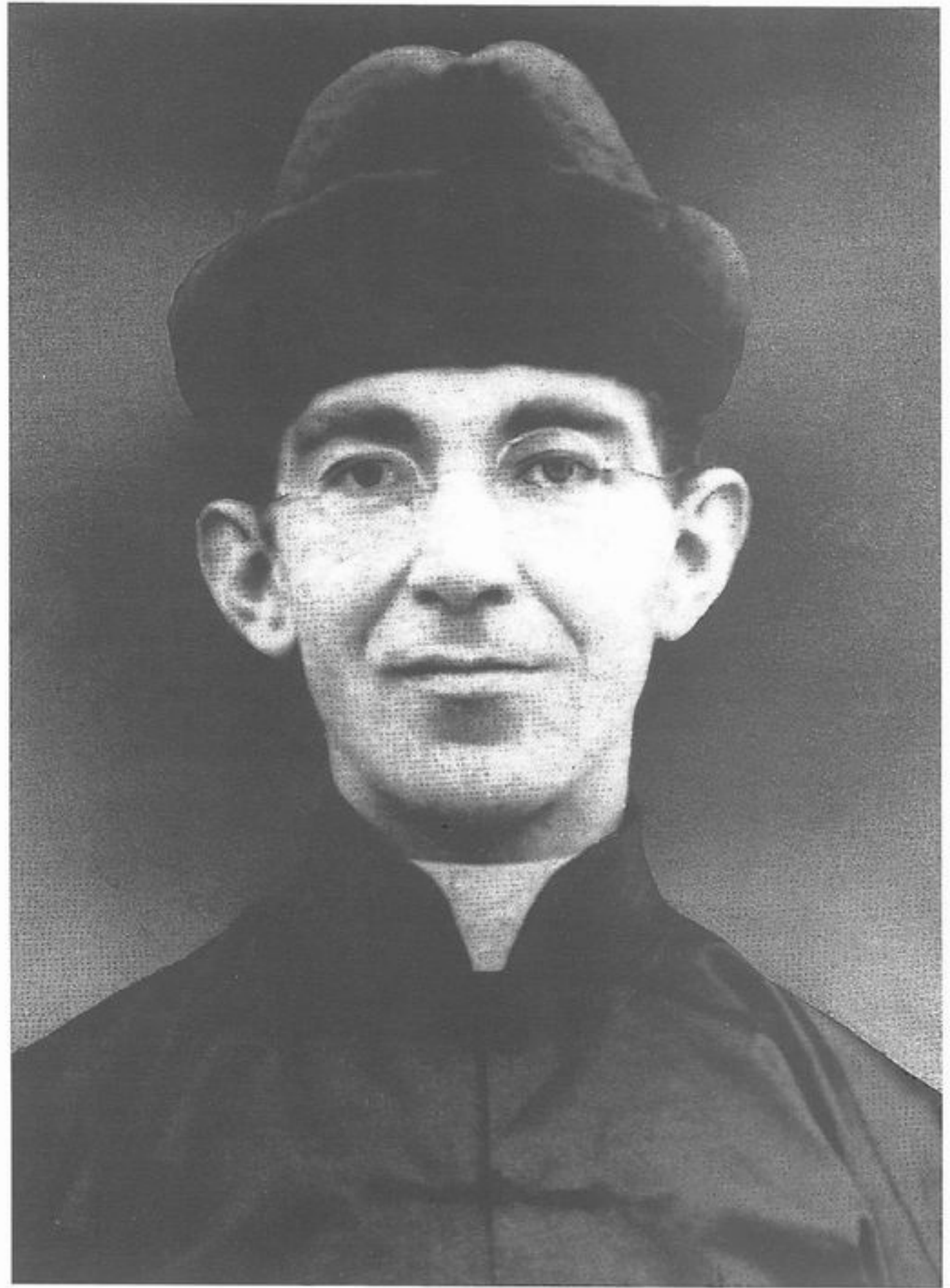
Limerick's first Columban Martyr

As a child growing up in Peafield, Ballysimon, by the banks of the Groody river - I was fascinated by the picture of the aesthetic, dark-haired, Fainne-wearing, priestly figure which hung prominently on the walls of the parlour, our main reception room. On enquiring whom this priest was my dear mother informed me that he was Fr Tim Leonard, my father's first cousin who, was born up the road at Ballycraheen. Furthermore, she told me that he was a martyr who suffered a cruel death at the hands of the Red Communists in China in 1929; she proudly forecast that one day he would be raised to the sainthood. He was an iconic figure in our house and my deeply religious mother, who had great devotion to him, would always advise me to pray to him. She was anxious that I would follow in his footsteps and become a priest but alas it was not to be. Fr Leonard was a great enthusiast for the revival of the Irish language and always wore the Fainne on his lapel and preferred to be called Tadhg, the Irish format of Timothy. In his letters home to his siblings he addressed them 'as Gaeilge' and signed off as 'Tadhg'.

Timothy Peter Leonard was born on a farm at Ballycraheen, Ballysimon, County Limerick, on the feast of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, on 29 June 1893. He was one of six children born to Mary Anne and William Leonard. The young Tim attended Monaleen National School and Saint Munchin's College, Limerick, before entering Saint Patrick's College, Maynooth to pursue his priestly studies for the Diocese of Limerick. On 28 April 1918, he was ordained to the priesthood and later that year he joined the newly formed Maynooth Mission to China; now known as the Society of Saint Columban. The founder was a Corkman, Bishop Edward Galvin. In 1920, Fr Leonard was among the first Columban Missionaries to go to China. Led by Bishop Galvin they sailed from Liverpool, on Saint Patrick's Day of that year, travelling via the United States where they received further missionary training at Omaha, Nebraska.

On arrival in Shanghai, China, the group embarked on an intensive course on the local language, Mandarin Chinese, for a number of months. On completion Fr Leonard was assigned to the Hanyang area [now Wuhan] where, with great enthusiasm, he began his missionary work.

In 1924, Fr Tim returned home to Ireland on promotional work for the Society. In all weathers, he cycled with gusto around the countryside seeking vocations and financial support. He preached at Parish churches, visited schools and colleges



Fr Tim Leonard

by John M Leonard

and parish halls where he presented his slide-show on the Columbans and their work in China. In Limerick he showed his slides at the old St Michael's Temperance Hall, charging six old pennies admission fee. He also attended fairs at the Munster Fair Tavern and, being of farming stock, he was very much at home amongst the farmers. They were generous towards his mission and gladly supported his cause. The story goes that during his promotional

travels in County Limerick he was staying with the Parish Priest of Athea, Fr Fenton who warned him of how dangerous it was for foreigners living in China. Displaying his bravery Fr Leonard said "He would have no problem giving his life for Christ." Fr Fenton asked his missionary guest "Does it ever occur to you that you might be killed out there in China?" "What if I were" replied the young missionary. "If I thought I wouldn't I would feel disappointed". "After all", he added "what is it but a bad quarter of an hour - think of the reward". He obviously had in mind the martyr's crown.

Fr Leonard returned to China in 1926 to continue his work in the Hubei region of Central China, striving tirelessly for the conversion and salvation of his flock. Two years later he was transferred to the Jiangxi Province where he became Pastor of Nan Feng in the Diocese of Nan Chang. He settled in fairly quickly and his enthusiasm for his pastoral duties knew no bounds. No task was too difficult for him as he travelled about on horseback to the outlying districts. The natives loved him. The situation became difficult with the communists, under Mao Tse-Tung, openly hostile to the influence of foreign religious ministers. In September 1927 Mao and his followers attempted to take Changsha the capital of Hunan, but were driven back by the Nationalist forces. The survivors fled to a remote mountain stronghold known as Chingkangshan on the borders of Hunan and Jiangxi. By 1929 the Red Army in and around Jiangxi was around 10,000 strong.

Mao's communists arrived in the town of Nan Feng on 15 July 1929. Fr Leonard was celebrating Mass that morning at 5 a.m. During the offertory the communists came into the church and seized him from the altar, knocking off his glasses in the process. His chief concern was the preservation of the Blessed Sacrament and as he protested against the sacrilege that was being committed he made valiant efforts to preserve the Sacred Hosts but the communists scattered them on the floor of the altar. Fr Leonard was enraged and refused to accede to their demand for a ransom. He was taken captive with sixteen others, including his Mass-server. Fr Leonard pleaded with his captors that the boy be released without ransom being paid. They agreed to do this and they took Fr Leonard and the other Catholics to their base camp in the mountains where they were interrogated and tortured. During this time Fr Leonard refused food and engaged in prayer. During a mock trial, on 16 July, he was condemned to death for 'practising religion' and on the following day he was executed being partially beheaded. A few days later, on 19 July, the remains of Fr Leonard were recovered from

a mountainous area about twenty miles from Nan Feng. His body was taken to the church where it reposed for three days; with the local Catholics paying their respects and chanting prayers. On 23 July his Columban colleagues Fathers Pat Der-

雷神父

Father Timothy Leonard



生于: 1893年 6月29日, 爱尔兰,
利默里克,

1918年 4月28日于爱尔兰, 利默里克
圣为天主教神父

1929年7月17 日于中国江西南丰
殉道

<http://columban.com/fw/martyrology.html>

个人祷文

吾主天主, 尔恩赐予来自爱尔兰的雷神父到中国传教. 愿尔赐予圣宠仿照雷神父的榜样, 相信耶稣在圣体中的真实存在, 普传圣教. 愿他对我们中华民族的自我奉献精神, 对需要关怀的人们的爱心服务及面对迫害至死的勇气, 激励更多的圣召去跟随主耶稣的脚步。

经雷神父的祈祷, 望尔赐我此请求 (私人请求)

天主经, 圣母经, 圣三光荣颂

遵照已故的教宗保禄八世, 此祷文不是供公众使用, 且不是教会意向与判决。

如果你的请求得到赐予, 请联络:

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Intercessory Chinese prayer

mody, Pat Quigley and a Chinese priest, Fr Diu, sang a solemn Requiem Mass for the repose of his soul and in celebration of his short life.

The people of Nan Feng stood silent and respectful as the funeral procession

passed through the crowded streets and as the remains of the young missionary was borne to San Gang [Holy Mountain] the July sun was a scorching 94 degrees Fahrenheit.

Silently and reverently the Chinese mourners filed out of Nan Feng on the three mile journey to San Gang, a hillside spot that was to be Fr Leonard's final resting place. In a rough wooden coffin lay the body of the pioneer Columban missionary, to China, from a far-away land. As the sorrowing Catholics lowered the body into the grave, one of them summed up his life 'Keh Ku...Chi Ming' meaning; mortified in life - a witness to Christ in death.

Fr Timothy Peter Leonard, 36 years of age, was the first martyr of the Society of Saint Columban. The Columbans were expelled from China when the communists overran the country in 1949.

Meanwhile, back home news of the martyred priest began to filter through. Fr P O'Carroll P.P. of Glin, County Limerick when he heard of the death of Fr Leonard; related another story of his dedication;

He recalled that nine years previously Fr Leonard visited him when he was P.P. in Ballyhahill. He was struck by his zeal and energy. Even though the night was a bad winter's one, he could not be prevailed on to remain overnight. His mode of travelling was a push bike, with which he came from Glin and, he said, by remaining with Fr O'Carroll at Ballyhahill he would lose half a day, as he had also to go to Abbeyfeale, which he did on his bike.

It was a sad day for the Leonard family at Ballycraheen when news of his death arrived, for the parish of Monaleen and of course for the Columban Fathers. His brothers Richard, Fr Joe and his sisters Jane and Molly were deeply shocked on receiving the news. But there was an unusual and joyful note from Sydney, Australia, where Dr William Leonard, a Scriptural scholar, and brother of Tim, in a cablegram message to his mother Mary, conveyed his reaction thus: 'Congratulations! You have become the mother of a martyr.' This message brought Mary A Leonard some consolation.

As time moved on Fr Leonard was largely forgotten until Bishop Donal Murray unveiled a memorial plaque in his native parish of Monaleen, in June 1997. This was done in co-operation with the Leonard family and the then Parish Priest, Fr Terry O'Brien. About 150 people and ten priests attended the ceremony. Fr Pat Raleigh, a Columban, from Bruff, County Limerick, gave a homily on the life and death of Fr Leonard.

In 2000, I travelled to China with Fr Joseph Houston, a Columban Father from Belfast. He helped me through Customs at Nan Chang airport. We had planned a meeting with Fr Tommy Yu who knew the whereabouts of Fr Tim's resting place. The rendezvous had to be abandoned as Fr Yu was suddenly put under house arrest because of his promotion of the 120 Chinese



John Leonard with Fr Tommy Yu and local priests at Fr Leonard's grave, 2005

martyrs canonised by Pope John Paul II in October 2000. Fr Yu had already spent twenty nine years in prison or under house arrest under the communists, and despite his suffering, at their hands, he is very forgiving and positive about the future of his country. We made the journey again in 2001 and finally met up with Fr Yu in Nan Cheng. After a hospitable reception we travelled the forty miles to Nan Feng accompanied by Fr Yu and members of his family. A member of the Catholic community and the head of the Religious Affairs Bureau for that region met us at the church in Nan Feng. As we viewed the church, with the original altar rails, we could see it had been used as a kindergarten school for young children. The adjoining Presbytery was in a semi-derelict state.

Local Catholics knew of the location of Fr Leonard's grave and with their help we travelled about three miles from the church

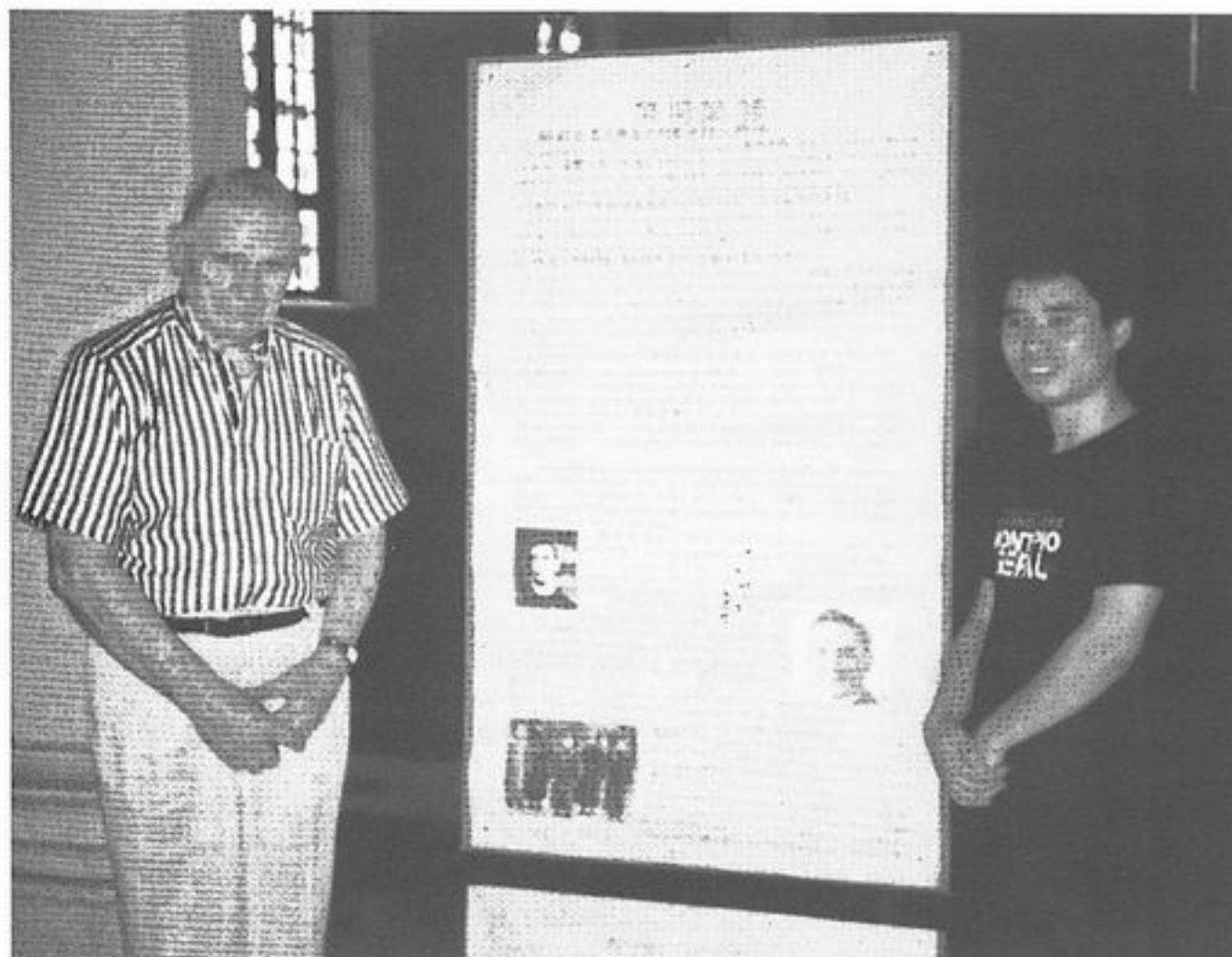
to the unmarked site where his remains lie at San Gang. We entered the graveyard, which is now an orchard with scattered graves here and there, finally coming to the unmarked grave where my cousin's remains are reputedly buried. It was a very emotional and solemn few moments for me as Fr Yu and Fr Houston led prayers from the Chinese ritual of the dead followed by a decade of the Rosary. It was also a historical occasion as I was the first member of the Leonard family to visit his grave after all those years. I was moved and happy and so thankful to Fr Joe and Fr Tommy for making this visit possible. Before leaving Fr Yu blessed the site and sprinkled Holy Water. As we returned to the roadside I discussed with Fr Yu the possibility of erecting a memorial headstone over the grave. This was decided, and with my financial contribution a headstone in the shape of a Celtic cross of black marble was erected

with a Chinese inscription and Fr Leonard's name in English. The local Catholics carried out the work under Fr Yu's supervision that was testimony to the esteem in which the martyred priest was held.

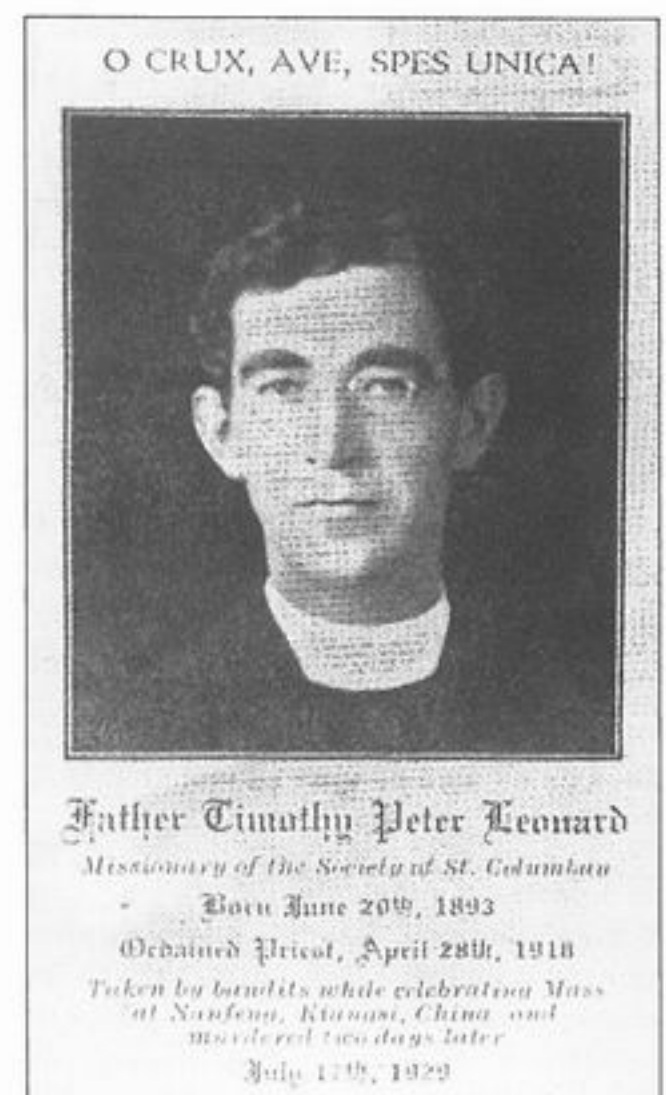
I returned to San Gang in 2005 to pay my respects and to see the headstone for the first time, and express my extreme satisfaction at this fitting memorial, to thank Fr Yu and the local community for carrying out the work. I understand that the local Catholic community visit the grave, where they light candles and place flowers, and seek the intercession of the martyred priest. In recent times, the church at Nan Feng has been returned to the Catholic authorities after its confiscation during the revolution of 1949. A young Chinese priest, Fr Joseph Zhang Tao was appointed to the parish and immediately carried out restoration on the Gothic building; new pews and windows were installed and the roof has been repaired. It is beautifully restored now with a gallery at the back of the church. A small congregation of about fifty people attend Mass in the church every Sunday. A Chinese nun, Sister Yan Yun Lan, assists Fr Zhang Tao in running the parish. Fr Yu is now living in retirement at Nan Cheng.

In the beatification of a martyr no miracles are required in the first process that consists of an examination into the life, virtues, writing and reputation for holiness of the Servant of God in question - conducted by the local bishop of the place where he died or lived for a long time. Pope John Paul II has automatically beatified those who have been martyred for the faith like Fr Leonard.

Father Timothy Leonard's heroic sanctity, his bravery in adversity, his pastoral charity and humility, his love of the Eucharist, reveal an interior richness, which, I believe, makes him a very suitable candidate for beatification.



Nan Feng church, John Leonard with Fr Joseph Zhang Tao by notice board listing the priests who served in the parish, including Fr Leonard, 2010



Fr Leonard Mortuary card