

Becoming a martyr in China: The Steyl Missionary Father Paul Buhl (1902—1944)

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To counteract oblivion, Pope John Paul II. (1920—2005) initiated a comprehensive reappraisal of the Christian victims of violence in the 20th century. The German Bishops' Conference took up this idea and asked the author of this article to compile the German Martyrology, together with 170 experts. The two-volume magnum opus "Witnesses for Christ. The German Martyrology of the 20th Century" is available since 2019 in its seventh, revised and updated edition.



Father Paul Buhl (1902—1944)

In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* of November 6, 1999, Pope John Paul II. directed attention to the blood witnesses who, especially in the 20th century, had a special significance. In the course of the centuries, the Asian continent has given the Church and the world a multitude of these heroes of faith, and in the heart of Asia resounds the great hymn of praise: "Te martyrum candidatus laudat exercitus". This is the hymn of those who died for Christ on Asiatic soil in the first centuries of the Church, and also the joyful shout of men and women of a less distant past, saints such as Paul Miki, Lorenzo Ruiz, Andrew Dung Lac, Andrew Kim Taegon, and their respective companions. May the numerous martyrs of Asia, old and new, always keep before the Church of their continent what it means to bear witness to the Lamb in whose blood they washed their robes and made them white (cf. Rev 7:14)! May they always be indomitable witnesses to that fact that Christians are always and everywhere called to proclaim nothing but the Cross of the Lord! Through the blood of the martyrs of Asia, may new life for the Church arise today and always in every corner of the continent" (n. 49).

Among the thousands of witnesses to the blood and faith of the 20th century, one of these "heroes of the faith" is the Steyl missionary Fr. Paul Buhl. His cradle stood in the small Upper Silesian village of Winau about three kilometers southwest of the city center of the metropolis of Opole. It was first mentioned in 1412, and in pre-Christian times there was a sacred mountain on this hill. During the Thirty Years War (1618—1648) the village was burnt down. In the 19th century the village had less than 300 inhabitants. Paul was born as the legitimate son of the farmer Johann Buhl (* 1862 Winau) and his wife Franziska, (family name before marriage: Skrzypczyk (* 1869 Bogutschütz) on March 11, 1902 in Winau. His older siblings were Josef and Johann, his younger ones Anastasia, Maria, Alfons, Franz and Robert; they were all born in Winau. His parents' fathers

also practiced the profession of farmer. Paul attended elementary school in the nearby village of Gorek; on April 22, 1911, he received First Holy Communion in Opole.

At the age of twelve, his parents sent Paul to the mission house of the Steyl missionaries in Heiligkreuz, not far from the Upper Silesian town of Neisse. This was the first mission house of the Steyl missionaries on German soil, founded in 1892 by St. Arnold Janssen (1837—1909), the founder of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), after it had been recommended to the imperial government by the senior pastor in charge of Breslau, Prince-Bishop Georg Cardinal von Kopp (1837—1914). On January 31, 1892, Superior General Janssen acquired the “Schäferei” estate with a plot of 125 acres. In the school established here, classes began on October 16, 1892, with eight pupils. Its purpose was to educate young students at a private grammar school associated with a boys’ convict, to prepare them for a later missionary vocation. This mission house, which became the Provincial House of the German Eastern Province in 1927, grew from year to year, and in 1900 it already had 250 students. In 1904 there were 31 Fathers, 46 Brothers and 236 alumni living in the Mission House. During the First World War, the stream of wounded and sick who were treated and cared for in Heiligkreuz, which had been transformed into a military hospital, did not cease.

Obviously, Paul’s vocation to the religious life matured during this time, because after successfully completing his studies at the Lower Austrian Mission House of St. Gabriel in Mödling near Vienna, he decided to join the Missionary Society of the Divine Word. The mission of the risen Christ will have inspired him: “Go and make disciples of all nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28: 19-20; cf. Lk 24: 47-49; Mk 16: 15-16; Jn 20: 21). At the age of 19, Paul began the novitiate in the Missionary Seminary of St. Gabriel. Following the probationary period, during which the Order tested him and he tested the spirituality of the Order, came the period of temporary vows. He promised to live the Gospel-derived virtues of poverty, chastity and obedience in the community for a set period of time. Since he aspired to the priesthood, he underwent philosophical and theological studies at St. Gabriel. The definitive commitment to the Order took place in 1927 through perpetual vows. One calendar year later, Frater Buhl was finally ordained to the priesthood in the monastery church of St. Gabriel, after the lower ordinations, the subdeaconate and diaconate ordinations. At the same time, the new priest received his missionary appointment for China.

Pope Leo XIII (1810—1903) had already paid special attention to the expansion of the Chinese mission. In view of future local synods, he divided it into five regions in 1879. In addition, the pope issued methodological instructions to the missionaries to China in 1883. Finally, he expanded the hierarchy in China. A move away from Eurocentrism was also promoted by his successor, Pope Pius X. (1835—1914). Pope Benedict XV (1854—1922) set a new emphasis in his circular *Maximum illud* of Nov. 30, 1919, which built on Leo XIII’s circular *Sancta Dei Civitas* of Dec. 3, 1880. In it, the pope rejected any colonial mission and called for the formation of a native clergy. At the same time, he called for a willingness to magnanimously accept possible “blows of fate, hardship, ignominy, hardship and hunger, even cruel death, if it can only snatch a single soul from the depths of hell” (AAS 19, 1919, 450). In 1922, Pope Pius XI (1857—1939) established the Apostolic Delegation in Beijing. As reasons for this measure, the Pope cited his love for the Chinese people, the unification of missionary work and the new upswing of the missionary work. He appointed Archbishop Celso

Costantini (1876—1958) as the first Apostolic Delegate, who held his office from 1922 to 1933. In the period from May 14 to June 12, 1924, the first Chinese National Council was held in Shanghai, with special emphasis on the elimination of tensions between the foreign and Chinese clergy, the redivision of the mission territories, which had grown to 64, and the gradual transfer of the leadership of ecclesiastical jurisdictional districts to the Chinese clergy. Two years later, on October 28, 1926, six Chinese bishops could be consecrated by the Pope in St. Peter's Basilica.

The superiors of the Congregation for the Missions had designated the province of Kansu for Father Buhl. Therefore, the new priest set out from Europe and traveled to the East Asian country. At the beginning there was the necessary language study, which he completed at the Steyl headquarters in Yanzhou (Shandong Province). All missionaries, foreign as well as local, were to receive special qualification for their mission. The result of these efforts was not only a linguistically better trained missionary staff, but also an enrichment of sinological studies. A visible expression of this became the *Monumenta Serica*, published by the Steyl missionaries from 1935 to the present day.

Father Buhl's superior in the mission was the Austrian Steyler missionary Father Dr. Johann Frick (1903—2003), and his superior was the German Archbishop Theodor Buddenbrock (1878—1959), Steyler missionary like him. According to Fr. Frick, Father Buhl was a quiet, calm confrere, pious and dignified, not a spoilsport, respected by the superiors. One could talk well with him, especially about pastoral care. He never maliciously criticized the work of others and helped where he could. He was also a contented man as far as food and board were concerned. Although he attested to independent thinking, he was sociable and liked by everyone despite his health problems. Even Archbishop Buddenbrock was always accommodating towards Father Buhl.

In 1931, Father Buhl began his missionary work in Zhangye, which is in the Lanzhou diocese. Seven years later he moved to West Kansu in the Wuwei/Xixiang area. The missionary work was greatly hindered by the ever-advancing exercise of power by the Communists. The Sino-Japanese War (1937—1945) and the outbreak of the Japanese-American War in 1941 did the rest. In view of these circumstances, the mission was hampered, indeed in the Communist-occupied northern provinces it was not insignificantly destroyed by waves of bloody and bloodless persecution. On March 19, 1937, Pope Pius XI, in his encyclical *Divini Redemptoris*, strongly condemned the teachings of communism. "Many priests and religious—three-fifths of those who worked in China in 1940 came from abroad—had been killed, and most of the foreign priests and religious had been interned" (Rivinius, *Art. China* III. 2, in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 2 1994, 1061). Father Buhl also had to flee together with his confreres because of the advance of the communists. During the escape he did not have a single seizure, despite all the hardships and dangers. The group fled over the mountains to Xining, the capital of Qinghai province. The way was difficult, the pack was large. Fr. Johann Frick recorded in this regard: "Fr. Paul Buhl was with me, he was already older, had epileptic seizures. Later he came to Xixiang, where the good confrere had rest until the good Lord called him away after his typhoid illness. It was a real martyrdom for him, this epilepsy. However, some of the confreres did not take this illness seriously." Further it says: "Father Buhl probably already got [on the flight] the harbingers of a seizure, twitching with the lips etc". Then Fr. Trippner (they were classmates and compatriots) said to him: Paul, don't make me any stories; if you get a seizure, we can't take care of

you, we have to move on; and Buhl then actually did not get a single seizure. From this some concluded that it was probably not epilepsy. But who can judge that—at least not me! When he was with me in Xincheng, he once had a seizure at the beginning of Holy Mass; the altar boy ran away, two men jumped over the communion bench, caught him in their arms. The local sisters asked me to send him away; they could not have devotions when he was at the altar; they always had to look to see if he would fall over“(SVD Archives, Sankt Augustin)”. Father Buhl died in 1944 in Wuwei/Xixiang (Kansu Province) as a result of his flight from the communists. He was not 43 years old. The Polish priest and scholar Andrzej Hanich honored Father Buhl in his *Opole Martyrology* from 2009 as a blood witness of the Church.

中文题目：

在中国成为一个殉道者：Steyl 传教士保罗布赫尔神甫 (1902—1944)

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