

Late Seoul archbishop listed as Japanese collaborator in World War II

SEOUL, South Korea - The late Archbishop Paul Kinam Ro of Seoul and six other Catholics are named as Japanese collaborators during World War II in a new encyclopedia.

Catholic lay leader John Chang Myon, Korea's prime minister from 1960-1961 and the father of Bishop John Chang-yik of Chunchon, is on the list along with four Seoul priests and one other lay leader, reported the Asian church news agency UCA News.

The Catholics are among 4,389 collaborators named in the three-volume, 3,000-page Biographical Directory of Pro-Japanese Collaborators.

Archbishop Ro, the country's first Korean-born bishop, chaired the Catholic Federation of Seoul Diocese to Fully Support Japan's War beginning in 1940, and is said to have visited a soldiers' training camp for Koreans forced to "volunteer" to fight for Japan.

The archbishop also instructed Catholics in 1942 to observe every first Sunday of the month as "Patriotism Sunday" and to say a "prayer for Japan's war" twice a day and following Sunday Mass, the encyclopedia said.

Chang, the coordinator of the Catholic federation, was a leader of the pro-Japanese National Federation for Japan's War, according to the encyclopedia.

It is not the first time the Seoul-based Institute for Research on Collaborationist Activities has named the late prelate and Chang, but the encyclopedia is the most complete attempt to date at cataloging pro-Japanese collaborators.

The institute introduced the encyclopedia at a ceremony in Seoul Nov. 8 attended by 400 historians and civic leaders.

The issue of collaboration has been a contentious one since Korea was liberated from Japanese rule, which lasted from 1910-1945.

South Korea failed in attempts to punish the pro-Japanese collaborators following liberation but the issue has remained a sore point for many and public calls to prosecute collaborators have gained ground in recent years.

Father Bosco Byeon Seung-sik, undersecretary of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea, said in an interview that the encyclopedia's list is misleading and should have made a clear distinction between active pro-Japanese collaborators and passive ones.

"The church had nothing to benefit from such cooperation," he said. "Under Japan's severe oppression, Archbishop Ro just tried to protect the church and its faithful."

Archbishop Ro became the first Korean bishop to head the Seoul vicariate in 1942. He retired in 1967 and died in 1984.