DAILY COMPASS
Managing Director Riccardo Cascioli
MADE FOR THE TRUTH

HONG KONG

# Jimmy Lai: martyr for the truth

WORLD 13_10_2025

***Riccardo Cascioli***

***We are publishing the article that appeared in the October issue of the Bussola monthly apologetics magazine, which profiles Jimmy Lai, the Hong Kong entrepreneur and publisher imprisoned for defending democracy and freedom in the former British colony. He will receive the 'Made for Truth' award at the next annual Nuova Bussola/Daily Compass Celebration Day on 25 October, which will be presented to his son, Sebastien Lai, on his behalf. Sebastian, who resides in Taiwan, is leading an international campaign to demand his father's release.***

**'If I go away, I not only give up my destiny, I give up God**, I give up my religion, I give up what I believe in'. These were Jimmy Lai's words in late 2020, when he made the decision to stay in Hong Kong knowing that the charges brought against him by the Chinese authorities under Hong Kong's new national security law would land him in jail. As a British citizen, Jimmy Lai could have opted for the easy opportunity to fly to the UK, but instead he chose to stay true to his vocation as a Catholic and a defender of democracy. 'I came here with nothing, the freedom of this place has given me everything... Maybe it's time I paid back for that freedom by fighting for it,' he said in an interview with *Agence France Presse* years earlier.

**Jimmy Lai was born in 1947 in Guangzhou, southern China**, at the height of the civil war. Following Mao's communist victory in 1949, his family went from being wealthy to being impoverished. At the age of 12, he fled alone to Hong Kong, then a British colony, where he began working in a textile company. Highly intelligent, he quickly climbed the career ladder to become a manager, before creating his own successful brand, Giordano, which enjoyed widespread popularity throughout Asia and made him a millionaire. He invested the profits from his enterprise by founding a publishing group, *Next Digital*, which quickly became number one in the British colony with its weekly digital magazine, *Next*, and the Chinese-language *Apple Daily*, founded in 1995. As the handover of Hong Kong from the United Kingdom to China approached on 1 July 1997, Jimmy Lai's newspapers — he had already become an outspoken critic of the Chinese government following the Tiananmen Square massacre on 4 June 1989 — became a beacon for the defence of democracy and freedom in Hong Kong.

**However, during this period, thanks to the influence of his wife**, Teresa, he embarked on a journey of reconciliation with the Catholic Church, guided by the Bishop Emeritus of Hong Kong, Cardinal Joseph Zen. This journey culminated in his baptism in 1997.

**This was certainly the most important moment of his life:** his faith illuminated his

identity and gave new meaning to his work and his civil battles, supported by another great figure of faith, Cardinal Zen. 'I am what I am. I am what I believe. I cannot change it. And if I can't change it, I have to accept my fate with praise', he said.

**Jimmy thus became a thorn in the side of the Chinese regime**, which, in the meantime, violated the agreements signed with the United Kingdom that had provided for the maintenance of democratic and free conditions in Hong Kong for 50 years ('One country, two systems' was the slogan), instead tightening its grip on the former British territory. The growth of the democracy movement and the large-scale demonstrations in 2019 and 2020 put him in the spotlight. However, the passing of the new National Security Act in 2020, which was applied retroactively against him, resulted in his imprisonment in December of that year, initially on charges of fraud, followed by charges of conspiracy and collusion with foreign forces.

**His publishing empire was finally wiped out in 2021** with the forced closure of *Apple Daily.* While he languishes in prison amidst various trials and strategic postponements in solitary confinement, broken only by periodic visits from his family and Cardinal Zen, his health is deteriorating to such an extent that his son, Sebastien, says this imprisonment is 'like a death sentence'.

**To this day, Jimmy Lai is awaiting his sentence** in the latest conspiracy trial. The hearings closed last August. However, hopes of an acquittal are practically nil. Jimmy Lai, now aged 78, has always been aware that he is facing martyrdom, accepting that freedom lies not in escaping totalitarian power, but in bearing witness to and remaining faithful to the truth.

**The *Nuova Bussola/Daily Compass* has therefore decided** to award him the 'Made for Truth' award, instituted for this occasion, which will be presented at its annual Celebration Day on 25 October. The theme of this event is 'Looking straight at God'. His son Sebastien Lai, who lives in Taiwan and leads an opinion campaign for his father's release, is flying to Italy to receive it on his father's behalf. Only the mobilisation of international public opinion and the governments of influential countries could push the Chinese government to release him, perhaps by expelling him from Hong Kong.

**'Made for Truth' is the claim of the *Nuova Bussola Quotidiana/ Daily Compass*** and indicates our human nature: we are made for truth and for Christ, and our existence and all of history find meaning in Him. Therefore, our news coverage, which is written through the lens of faith is oriented towards what gives meaning to our lives.

**Jimmy Lai embodies this claim,** first as an editor and then as a man who is living and

giving his life in the name of truth. While the world sees his stance as merely a battle for democracy and freedom, it actually has a much broader horizon and meaning: it is the battle of truth against deception; of a man who looks straight at God against a power that wants to prevent him from doing so; of a man who proclaims his allegiance to Christ against the diabolical attempt to make him a slave to others.