

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

CHGO-38
Religious Encounters in China

27 Lugard Road,
The Peak,
Hong Kong.

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Mr. R.H. Nolte,
Institute of Current World Affairs,
366 Madison Avenue,
New York 17, N.Y..

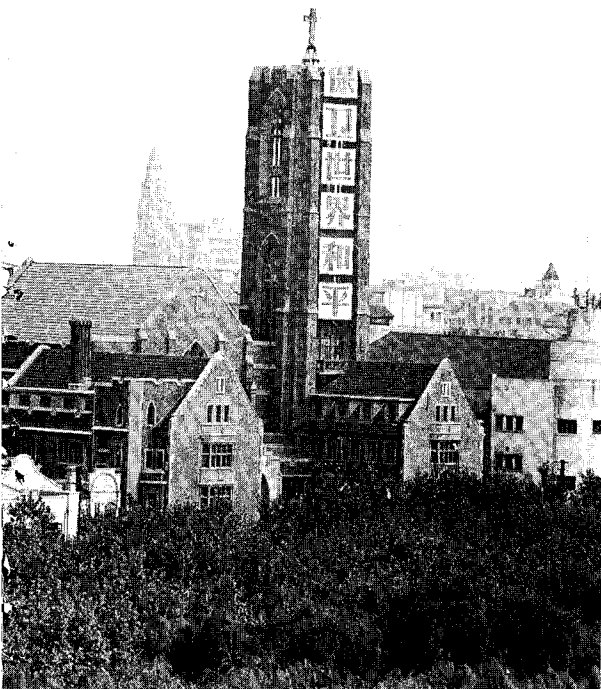
Dear Mr. Nolte,

In Peking recently I met a Canadian psychologist and his wife. When they learnt I was going to Nanking they asked me to return a coat lent to them by Bishop Ting's wife. Bishop Ting is an Anglican (Episcopalian) Bishop and is head of the Protestant Theological Seminary in Nanking. The Canadian couple had met the Tings through a letter of introduction from a mutual friend in Toronto, and Mrs. Ting had lent the coat to the Canadian girl to protect her from the cold weather she would encounter in Peking.

I was delighted to have an excuse to see the Tings and asked the China International Travel Service manager in Nanking if he could arrange a meeting. I was invited to the Bishop's home where I met both Bishop and Mrs. Ting. The house was pleasantly decorated with rather old-fashioned Western style furniture which gave it a peaceful atmosphere. Bishop Ting had to leave for the airport after about forty-five minutes conversation, to catch a plane to Shanghai, but I stayed and talked to Mrs. Ting for another half-hour. The following afternoon I visited the Theological Seminary. Both visits were made without an interpreter and all conversations were in English.

Bishop Ting and his wife lived in Toronto for a year in 1947-48 and returned to China from Geneva in 1951. He is a tall, well-built man, probably in his early fifties. He wore the dark blue, high buttoned tunic characteristic of Chinese officials. Last year he was elected to the National Peoples' Congress in Peking. At first the conversation

A Shanghai Church with the slogan,
"Protect World Peace".



centered around who I was and what I was doing, but then I said that there would be many people in the West who would like to know about the Church in China and asked if I might put some questions to the Bishop. He agreed. I did not make notes but as soon as I returned to the hotel I wrote down our conversation. I began:

Would you please tell me something about the state of the church in China today.

Bishop Ting: Yes, there are 3,000,000 Catholics and 700,000 Protestants in China today. These numbers seem to be fairly stationary. The number of new Christians just about balances those who die or leave the Church. The Protestant Churches still maintain their different denominations although there is greater collaboration between the different faiths than there was before. Also the Theological Seminary here in Nanking is run jointly by all the Protestant Churches and is the only Protestant Seminary in China. There are 86 men training for the ministry. This may not seem a great number for the whole of China, but we are not a big Church and it is about the right number for our present needs. The State believes religion will wither away in a few generations but freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Constitution.

CHGO: Do you still have Baptisms and Confirmations in the Anglican Church?

Bishop Ting: Yes.

CHGO: In Hong Kong I have heard the missionaries who came to China criticized for importing into China a foreign religion and not adapting it to Chinese ways. For example, church architecture, hymns, and services were all exactly copied from the West. Are you making any changes to fit Christianity to Chinese conditions?

Bishop Ting: We are making some changes. There are new hymns and some changes to the service but these are small changes which are being introduced gradually. The big change that has taken place has been in the organization of the Church. Perhaps you have heard of our "Three-self" movement for self-support, self-determination, and self-propagation. In the past the Church in China was dominated by foreign powers who used missionaries for their own ends. Now we insist on a Chinese Church run by Chinese and with no foreign interference of any kind.

CHGO: Now that you are established as a Chinese Church, why don't you take a bigger part in international Church activities. Why, for example, did you not send a representative to the World Council of Churches meeting in Toronto last year?

Bishop Ting: It was not because we are not allowed. But experience

shows we must be very careful in our relations with foreign churches, otherwise those who once controlled our churches in China will try again to exert their control. International contacts tend to have more political significance than theological value and we must pick and choose very carefully.

CHGO: In many countries the Church serves a social welfare and educational function. Is this still the case in China?

Bishop Ting: No. There is no need. The State does these things and does them much better than the Church ever did or ever could.

CHGO: We hear reports in the West that many churches have been closed. Is this true?

Bishop Ting: Yes. But it is not because the State closed them. It is a consolidation. Where there used to be six churches of different denominations in one street, as was the case in Peking, we have closed some down and the congregations now go together to one. But in addition to closing some, we have also built new ones.

After Bishop Ting's departure I continued my conversation with his wife. She was a most charming person and told me that she teaches English in the Foreign Language Department at Nanking University. She asked me for my impressions of scientific development in China, and asked how it compared with what I had seen elsewhere in Asia, and added, "We still have a long way to go. Some of our friends come to China expecting to find too much and are disappointed. It is a great pity you did not see the old China and could compare, then you could realize how much has been accomplished."

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During our conversation Bishop Ting had suggested that I might care to visit the Seminary, so the following afternoon I did so and was met by Han Wen Tsao, Director of General Administration, and Chen Cheh Ming, the Dean of Studies. Our conversation covered much the same ground as in my previous interview with the Bishop.

I learned that there were 14 full time staff members for the 86 students. Most of the latter were from second and third generation Christian families, although a few were first generation Christians. The usual theological courses are given in the Seminary plus a course on the history of the Chinese Revolution. Marxism-Leninism is not taught. In addition there are current affairs classes. I asked if the students were able to read Western newspapers and magazines to get a Western view on current affairs, in addition to the Communist view. I was told that the students were taught to read the Western press critically, but later when I went

round the reading rooms I saw only Chinese journals, magazines and papers. I asked for the number of baptisms and was told that they did not know the figures off-hand, but baptism services were held three times a year, at Christmas, Easter, and Chinese New Year. I also asked about finances, and was told that most of their money came from the congregations, but the Church does not have to pay tax on either church property or the residences of its clergy.

We then discussed the changes that had taken place in the Church in China. Mr. Han said that the services had changed very little, "If you go to an Anglican service when you are in Shanghai you will find it much the same as in a Chinese church in Hong Kong. We use the same hymnal, same prayer book, and same Bible. There is however, a new spirit in the Chinese church. It has got rid of the old imperialist missionaries and is standing on its own feet. Now the congregations are more willing to give money for the support of the Church. The old missionaries were merely tools of the politicians -- especially the Americans."

"Yes," I said, "I know you claim the missionaries had their faults, but surely you must admit they did a lot of good too. What about all the schools and hospitals they built?" Mr. Han said, "It is true that schools were built, but they were very expensive and only the rich could afford to go, and both schools and hospitals would have come anyway." I then asked, "Since you feel so bitterly about the missionaries who were in China, do you consider that any missionary work is wrong? What is your attitude to people of one country preaching the Gospel and trying to convert to Christianity the people of another country? Do you, for example, have any of your own missionaries working with the minority groups in China?" Mr. Chen answered this question, he said, "In principle, no, we are not opposed to missionary work as such, but we are opposed to missionaries being used as economic and military spies. For ourselves we prefer not to use the word missionary, it conjures up such bad feelings, we prefer to use the words, Church worker, and we do have Church workers among the National minorities."

I raised again the question of China's participation in international Church affairs and asked them why China was not represented at the meeting of the World Council of Churches in Toronto. Mr. Han replied, "The World Council of Churches has been very unfriendly to China. They issued a declaration in support of India over the border dispute. Bishop Ting attended the preparatory talks for the Lambeth Conference in London and was insulted. In Prague in 1956, Bishop Ting was not asked to report on the Church in China, but someone who had made a three week visit was asked instead. Our experience of international conferences has not been a happy one."

I then said, "I have one final question which I hesitate to ask because I don't see that you can possibly give me a really genuine answer. Under the circumstances it is an unfair question." They told me to ask it anyway, so I said, "What do you feel is the future of Christianity in China? Your Government has said religion will wither away in a few generations -- what do you think?" Mr. Han answered, "It is true that the Communists have no time for religion themselves, but they do not use force. Frankly we were scared when

we knew the Communists were coming. Foreign missionaries told us we would be persecuted and maybe killed. But when the Peoples' Liberation Army came we found things were quite different, we were not persecuted. Bit by bit we found out the truth. The Communists say religion is the opium of the people, but they do not ask us to agree with their views. The Christian Church has survived for almost 2,000 years under a variety of political systems, we believe it will continue to survive. If we did not think this, we would not be Christians. We have our faith."

On two occasions during this interview Mr. Chen asked what news we got in Hong Kong about the Church in China. I said I thought we got very little, and that I know many Hong Kong residents who would be interested to learn of my visit.

After the discussion I was shown around the Seminary. It is a delightful place, pleasantly situated in its own grounds with well kept lawns and gardens. I saw the Chapel, library, reading rooms and several of the classrooms. We glanced into one where there was a class of about 15 young men having a lesson in Greek. I saw several other students in the library and spoke briefly to some of them. They were an alert looking group of young men. After the tour I was taken to see the Seminary Museum. It was one of the saddest little museums I have ever seen. Its main purpose was to present the evidence for the case against the foreign missionaries, to show that they had taken part in many activities which were not spiritual. Most of the evidence was in the form of books, papers and documents, and photographs, which were supposed to prove the missionaries were not missionaries at all, but merely tools of their governments, and of course, especially the U.S. government. I made notes on some of the displays. The following are examples:

- An American book, published in 1958 called Missionaries, Chinese and Diplomats, by Paul Varg. It was open at page 82, and the following passage underlined: "To draw a sharp line between the secular movement of imperialism and the religious movement of missionaries is hazardous."
- A photograph showing missionaries who took part in the drafting of the Unequal Treaties, in the 1840's.
- A circular letter from the U.S. Consulate in Nanking, dated 1919, to all missionaries asking them to send information of value for U.S. commerce and trade. There were also several replies.
- A photograph of Leighton Stewart who came to China as a missionary and later became the last U.S. Ambassador. He signed Unequal Treaties.
- A photograph of an American missionary who took part in military action against the Peoples' Liberation Army in 1946.
- A code book supplied by the State Department to facilitate the sending of information by missionaries.

- A letter from the U.S. Government freely admitting the help gained from missionaries.
- A book published in 1951 (or '57?) called China and America Today, by A.H. Smith. It was opened and the following sentence underlined: "Trade follows moral and spiritual domination far more inevitably than it does the flag."
- A directory prepared by American missionaries for theological students' field work which stated all students should make maps which showed the location of police stations, fire brigades, etc., in each village they visited.
- A copy of a report prepared for the Senate Committee on Un-American Activities in 1959 called, "Communist persecution of Churches in Red China and North Korea." The authors were five Chinese, none of whom had visited China since "liberation". The report contained passages about "so-called happy homes for the aged in China, where the old folk are taken, given happy pills and injections which kill them off within two weeks."

The list could go on to fill several pages. I am sure everything I saw there was genuine. The Chinese do have a valid case against some missionaries, but it was saddening that all missionaries should be so branded.

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I arrived in Shanghai late on a Saturday afternoon and asked to attend an Anglican service in a Shanghai church on Sunday morning. Unfortunately I did not know the Chinese term for "Anglican church" and the China International Travel Service could not locate the Anglican church on such short notice. I was offered a "Protestant service", but since I would have had trouble following the Chinese language service unless it were familiar, and since my objective was primarily to see what changes had been made to the service, I declined.

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I had one other religious encounter in China. This was on the October Commune just outside Nanking where there is an old and picturesque temple called the Temple of the Thousand Buddhas. Most tourists who visit Nanking and who ask to see a commune are taken to this one, and as a part of the tour the chief monk shows the tourists around the temple. He is a pleasant old fellow, rather stooped but with a happy glint in his eye, and he shuffled around pointing out the various things of interest in the temple.

He then took me into the monastery and showed me his living quarters. I noticed a 1963 issue of the Chinese language



Head Monk at the Temple of the Thousand Buddhas
on the October Commune near Nanking

journal, The Modern Buddhist, on his desk. He also showed me the Monastery's collection of books. There were more than 7,000, some in Tibetan, and others in Han script. One of the books had come from Ceylon more than 500 years ago.

I asked him, "How many monks are here?"

"Thirty," he replied.

"Any new ones?"

"No, not since Liberation."

"Why?" I asked.

"Before Liberation it was only the very poor peasants who couldn't afford to live, who became monks, now everyone has got plenty, and no-one wants to become a monk anymore."

"If there are no new monks, what is going to happen to this magnificent temple in the future?"

"Bu i ding," .. its not settled. "We have not thought about it yet."

The old monk shuffled out of his living quarters and back into the temple. As he did so the Commune director who had

accompanied us, closed the door to the quarters. A gesture of helpfulness -- or one which suggested the control of the commune? I couldn't be sure. I learned later however, that the Buddhists do have some monks in training and provided the Buddhists show no anti-communist tendencies, they too are allowed freedom of religion.

Yours sincerely,

C.H.G. Oldham.

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