

BEYOND THE GREAT WALL: ORTHODOXY IN CHINA

For westerners, contemporary China is as exotic and mysterious as it was to the first European traders on the Great Silk Road a millennium ago. In July 2002, editors and friends of *Road to Emmaus* attended a three-week international theological conference in Volos, Greece, where we met two Chinese Orthodox Christians, Ioasaph Yaokum and Ioannis Chen. Each evening, to escape the sweltering heat, we retired to the roof of our lodgings where conversations about world Orthodoxy went on until early morning. Ioannis captivated us with insights into the mind and soul of contemporary China.

ORTHODOXY COMES TO CHINA

ROAD TO EMMAUS: Ioannis, will you tell us about the beginning of Orthodoxy in China?

IOANNIS: There are records of Nestorian Persian monks in China by the seventh century with churches and monasteries. It is possible that there was earlier Christian influence by unknown missionaries, traders, or embassies for which we have no evidence; we were on the Great Silk Road and there were many foreign travelers.

The Orthodoxy that exists today began in Beijing (formerly Peking), the capital, where later, there were Orthodox martyrs from the Boxer Rebellion. Today, there are about two hundred Orthodox Christians in Beijing, and we call them the *Albazin*. The Beijing mission began after a 17th-century border dispute between the Ch'ing Dynasty and the Russian Empire at a fort near

Albazin. We Chinese won, and took the captured Russian Cossack soldiers to Beijing, to the famous Emperor Kang He, who pardoned them and set them free. Most went back to Russia, but a few stayed in Beijing and married Chinese women, becoming part of the Emperor's guard. They were called the "Russian Hundred." There was a priest among the captives, Fr. Maxim Leontiev, and those who stayed asked the Emperor for a place to worship. He gave them an unused Buddhist temple that they turned into an Orthodox chapel. Later, Tsar Peter I sent several other priests to Beijing to establish a small mission. That was the beginning of Orthodoxy in China, although for many centuries it did not spread very far beyond the Russian community.

RTE: Why was that?

IOANNIS: The mission was primarily for the Russian community, and in some ways it was a diplomatic tool of Tsar Peter the Great. He had already abolished the patriarchate and in its place, he created a synod of bishops closely tied to the government. I believe that he thought the first duty of the mission was to be useful to the Russian government. He also told the priests to be very cautious, not to stir up the Chinese authorities. Over a century later, when Orthodoxy began to spread, native Chinese priests and deacons were ordained, and services were translated into Chinese.

RTE: Were there Orthodox monasteries in China?

IOANNIS: China has always had a strong monastic tradition among the Taoists and Buddhists. I know of several Orthodox monasteries in Shanghai, Beijing, and Harbin, where the monastics were both Russian and Chinese — I once saw an old photo of these Chinese Orthodox monks and nuns. These monasteries were closed after our communist revolution in 1949, and the monastics exiled or driven out. Now, a few young people are becoming interested and I hope that someday we can reestablish monasticism.

SHANGHAI: THE PERSECUTED YEARS

(Orthodox Autonomy and the Asian Calendar)

RTE: Will you tell us now about your own city of Shanghai?

IOANNIS: Yes. The Orthodox mission in Shanghai began in the 19th century, long after the mission to Beijing. The first ruling bishop was a vicar-bishop

Simeon, who worked under Archbishop Innocent of Beijing after the Boxer Rebellion. The first actual bishop of Shanghai was St. John Maximovitch, the famous wonderworker. St. John also ordained Chinese deacons and priests, but most of them left China with him. One of them, Fr. Ilia, is still alive. He is now 107 and serves at the Joy of All Who Sorrow Cathedral in San Francisco.

At the end of World War II, there was a disagreement between Archbishop Victor, who oversaw the Chinese mission, and St. John Maximovitch. Archbishop Victor wanted to return to the Moscow Patriarchate, but St. John didn't agree; he felt it was too soon. Unfortunately, this created turmoil among the Orthodox in China and some of the Chinese priests went to the government. At that time, the Chinese government under Jiang Jie Shi was very careful about Communism and these priests told the authorities that Archbishop Victor was part of the KGB. The government imprisoned him for six or seven months. This was before our own communist revolution in 1949, and Archbishop Victor suspended the clergymen who had denounced him. Later, several of them repented and returned to the Moscow Patriarchate, while others left China and joined the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia. At the time of the arrest, St. John had already left Shanghai with his flock and gone to America, but after his release Archbishop Victor stayed in China until the 1950's, when he returned to Russia to serve as a bishop in Siberia.

The Orthodox Church in Shanghai was then in a very difficult situation because it had no spiritual leader, so the Orthodox elected Fr. Theodore Du Run Chen as bishop. He had previously served in Beijing as a married priest. After his matushka died and he was nominated, he went to Moscow to be tonsured and consecrated, where he took the name Simeon. He returned to Shanghai in the early 1950's and was later made archbishop.

A few years after Bishop Simeon's consecration, the Chinese and Russians came to an agreement about recognizing Orthodoxy in China. The Moscow Patriarchate under Patriarch Alexis I granted autonomy to the Chinese



Protopresbyter Ilia Wren from Shanghai, now 107, serving at Joy of All Who Sorrow Cathedral in San Francisco.



Fr. Ilia with St. John Maximovitch in Shanghai in 1940's.

Church in 1956 and withdrew its material support.

RTE: Do you think this was part of Khrushchev's plan to destroy the Church by isolating and dividing it?

IOANNIS: I'm not sure. It could have been, but at that time the Russian Church inside of Russia was in a very difficult position, and since the Chinese Church had been given its autonomy, there was no reason for it to continue receiving everything from the mother Church. Also, the Chinese government may have been insisting that the ties be broken.

Bishop Simeon was at first strongly against the idea of autonomy, but after several meetings he felt that he had to obey the other hierarchs. The church situation in Shanghai at that time was very tense, and our political situation was oppressive. Social pressure drove young people out of the church and public schools were openly teaching atheism. The final years of Bishop Simeon's life were very sad, and he died in poverty. Only about twenty people attended the last Paschal service he celebrated in the early 1960's.

RTE: Religion in general was illegal at this point?

IOANNIS: No, not in the early 60's, only between 1966 and 1976, but certainly, Bishop Simeon's last days were not comfortable. After that last Pascha, he was bedridden for two years. When he reposed, the church in Shanghai fell into confusion. There was no new bishop and the clergymen didn't know how to support themselves or their families, or even whom to answer to. The Chinese government stepped in and said, "We will arrange jobs for you, but you may not serve as priests any longer." Several of them worked as Russian language teachers.

Two or three years after the death of Archbishop Simeon the "Cultural Revolution" began. From 1966 on, every tradition, every religion in China was destroyed ... not only Orthodox, but also Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant places of worship.¹

¹ The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was launched by Mao Zedong, who had risen to power with the Communists in 1949, in a move to "purify" the Communist party. The revolution saw the growth of the Red Guard Movement among Chinese youth, and the government worked through schools, widespread propaganda, and compulsory reeducation to inculcate Mao's philosophy. Chinese cultural traditions were uprooted and all temples, churches, synagogues and mosques that had not been destroyed in the earlier Communist period were closed. According to some historical analysts, between 1966 and 1968 alone, over 400,000 politically or philosophically dissident Chinese were killed. Among them were Christians of all denominations.

The communists had begun this destruction earlier, so, by the time of the Cultural Revolution there were only two open Orthodox churches in Shanghai: the cathedral built by Archbishop John and dedicated to the Mother of God, Surety of Sinners, and the Church of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker. The cathedral was very beautiful; the walls were white and covered with five blue domes, and each dome had a tall golden cross. St. Nicholas the Wonderworker was small, but also beautiful, and covered with nine golden domes. The government eventually confiscated the buildings and used them for other things. It was very sad.

RTE: And at this time churches and temples were closed all across China?

IOANNIS: Yes, and most were destroyed. Shanghai fared better than Beijing and Harbin because our churches had already been taken for other uses. The buildings themselves weren't destroyed. Fortunately, over the past twenty years there has been a revival. It has become easier to practice religion and many of the temples, churches and mosques have been rebuilt, but the Orthodox churches have not recovered like the others.

RTE: Why?

IOANNIS: In Shanghai, after the Cultural Revolution, only three clergymen remained alive, two priests, both named Fr. Michael, and a protodeacon, Fr. Evangelos. There was also a subdeacon, Papi. According to Chinese law, only native Chinese clergymen can legally serve on Chinese soil, but we had no bishops to ordain them, even if there had been candidates among the remaining believers. Beginning in the 1980's, the last clergymen, headed by Fr. Michael Li, asked the government to give us back two of the churches, but each time the authorities had a different excuse why they could not.

The communist government does not encourage the development of religion, even today, and also, our bureaucracy is like that of many other countries — the Ministry of Religion does not want to do more work than it has to. Also, the Orthodox community in Shanghai is very small, no more than one hundred people, and the government respects numbers. They don't respect



The Annunciation

us, they don't recognize us, they don't want to deal with us. Fr. Michael Li was continuously disappointed; his many requests were fruitless.

Finally in 2000, Fr. Michael Li decided to leave China. He went to Australia where he now serves in a Chinese-Russian parish belonging to ROCOR, under Archbishop Hilarion. We heard from someone visiting Harbin that the first time he vested himself in Australia, he looked down at his vestments and began to cry, saying, "For so many years, I have not touched these or even seen them." His Australian parishioners have a great love for Fr. Michael and his *matushka*. He's over 75 now, and I've been told that people hear them singing and chanting together when they are alone in their home.

Now in Shanghai, there are only two clergymen: Fr. Michael Wong, one of the priests from before the revolution who is now 85 and can no longer serve because of his health, and Fr. Evangelos, the protodeacon, who is 70. Without a priest he can do nothing except reader's services.

RTE: How long has it been since the people of Shanghai have had a liturgy?

IOANNIS: The last one was before the death of Archbishop Simeon, thirty-five years ago.

RTE: The remaining priests couldn't serve secretly?

IOANNIS: Everything had been taken from them. They didn't have antimens, chalices, service books, anything.

RTE: Does the autonomous Chinese Orthodox Church still exist?

IOANNIS: For the government, it still exists on paper, but not in reality because we don't have even one priest who can officially serve in China. There are only two priests still living. Fr. Michael Wong, whom I mentioned, and Fr. Alexander in Beijing. He is an archpriest, also very old, about 84, and very ill. This Pascha I heard that he is dying. Except for Fr. Evangelos, the protodeacon, there aren't any other Orthodox clergymen in China. We cannot bring in foreign clergy because of the Chinese law I mentioned, which allows only native Chinese clergy to serve.

RTE: It's amazing that the Orthodox remnant in Shanghai were able to stay faithful all those years without the sacraments.

IOANNIS: They are mostly old people. Not many young people remain loyal to Orthodoxy. They don't understand it, no one teaches them, no one tells them about it. This is the first problem.

The second problem is that the older men and women still hide their faith because of the years of persecution. And what can the faithful do without a priest? They don't know many prayers because there are no books or translations. Everything was destroyed. Every morning and evening they cross themselves and read some short prayers like the "Our Father" and the Trisagion. They know to pray to God, to the Holy Trinity, to the Mother of God, to St. Nicholas ... They also remember the date of Pascha — they ask relatives overseas to find out the date every year, and they make the traditional cake for Pascha, *kulich* and red eggs. They celebrate by themselves, they bless and sanctify the feast with their prayers.

RTE: They were very young when things became difficult.

IOANNIS: Yes, they were young and they are also very simple people. The generation after the Cultural Revolution forgot everything. In Lap Da Lin, in Harbin, in Manchuria, and in the Xin Jiang province, there are still pockets of Orthodoxy. Close to the Russian border there are several mixed Russian-Chinese villages where people keep more of the traditions. They are a little freer.

RTE: Do these remaining Orthodox Christians use the old Julian calendar?

IOANNIS: Yes. In Xin Jiang, in Beijing, in Harbin, all the old Russian mission descendants use the old calendar, but the Greeks in Hong Kong who belong to the Ecumenical Patriarchate use the new calendar. The Greek Metropolitan, Nikitas, is new calendar, but he also serves old calendar for Russians and Serbs in Hong Kong on the major feasts. Many of the Asian Orthodox parishes are under the Greek Archdiocese of Hong Kong and they all use the new calendar. In Japan they use the old calendar, and in Korea, the new calendar.

Japan uses the old calendar, but celebrates Christmas on the new calendar. This is a problem liturgically because they are celebrating Christmas in the middle of the fast. After Christmas they put in extra Sundays before Theophany to come back into line with the old calendar, but these Sundays are artificial. They have no place in the liturgical cycle. On the practical side, I can't say anything because Christmas is a very popular feast in Japan.



THE NEW MARTYRS OF BEIJING

RTE: Earlier you mentioned the Chinese new martyrs of the Boxer Rebellion. Will you tell us their story?

IOANNIS: Yes. The first native Chinese Orthodox priest, New Martyr Mitrophan, wasn't ordained until 1870 or 1880, over a century after the mission began, but what is very interesting is that he was ordained by St. Nicholas of Tokyo, who was then the Russian bishop of Japan. Fr. Mitrophan was a very humble man. He refused ordination many times, saying, "I am just a simple, uneducated man, how can I become a priest? How can I stand before the fearful altar of God?" Finally, he obeyed the wishes of the mission authorities and the local parishioners. I'm not sure whether he went to Tokyo to receive the priesthood or if Bishop Nicholas came to Beijing.

After his ordination, Fr. Mitrophan worked hard for the mission, but he was often looked down on by both the Chinese and Russian Orthodox who said, "This priest doesn't have a theological education, he doesn't chant well." He didn't defend himself, but continued to serve and quietly preach. When he was about fifty, he began having problems with his memory and retired near the mission, receiving a half-salary pension. As far as I know, he was the only Chinese priest at that time.

In 1900, when the Boxer Rebellion broke out,² people encouraged Fr. Mitrophan to go to the Russian Embassy to take refuge, but he refused, saying, "Yes, as an Orthodox priest, my family and I can go to the Russian embassy, but who will protect my people? If the priest leaves, the flock may scatter. I don't know if they will be able to keep the faith." So, he stayed in

² The Boxer Rebellion of 1900 was a nationalistic uprising that attempted to drive all foreigners from China. Violent mobs attacked foreigners throughout the country and rampaged through Peking (Beijing) in July and August. The rebellion was not without reason: forty years earlier the English had occupied Peking and burned part of the city (including the imperial summer palace) when Chinese officials attempted to block English opium trade in China. The European Christian community was particularly under attack because of its undisguised support of European economic and political interests. Protestant missionaries had involved themselves in Chinese politics, occupied civil positions as magistrates and judges, and often required Chinese converts to take on Western attitudes and dress.

"Boxer" was the English name given to a Chinese secret society that practiced "boxing and calisthenic rituals" (perhaps a form of martial arts) that they believed would make them impervious to bullets. Support for them grew in Northern China during the late 19th century, when the nation was suffering from growing poverty and forced to grant humiliating concessions to Western powers. In June 1900, an international relief force was dispatched to deal with the growing threat of the Boxers. The dowager empress, Cixi, ordered imperial forces to block its advance; the conflict escalated and many Europeans and Chinese Christians in Beijing were killed. Hostilities ended with massive reparations paid to the U.S, Germany, and other foreign powers. Although she professed political sympathy towards the Boxers (in part to secure her own position) the empress sent much covert relief to Europeans trapped by the fifty-five day siege.

church that night, serving an all-night vigil with his parishioners. They knew that anti-foreign mobs were rampaging through Beijing, and although a few apostatized out of fear, most of the Orthodox came to church to wait and pray.

RTE: They knew they were going to be killed?

IOANNIS: Yes, they knew. The mob finally arrived and seized Fr. Mitrophan. They told him, “You can no longer believe in Christ. You are Chinese, you have to sacrifice to the Chinese gods.” Fr. Mitrophan answered, “My God, Jesus Christ, is not only for Russians, but for the Chinese and all the people



The Holy Chinese Martyrs of the Boxer Rebellion

of the world.” They shouted, “If you don’t do as we say, we will show you what we can do,” and they killed his matushka and his children in front of him. “Now you see, your God Jesus Christ is not so powerful — He didn’t save them.” Fr. Mitrophan replied, “No, He saved them. I didn’t lose them, because I will meet them in the heavenly kingdom.” They said, “Where is the heavenly kingdom?” Fr. Mitrophan answered, “I see it. You cannot see it because you are not baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. If

you truly believe in Jesus Christ, He will open your eyes and show you the heavenly kingdom.” Then they gouged out his eyes and said, “And now, what do you see?” “Now, I see the heavenly kingdom more clearly, not with my bodily eyes, but with my soul and with my heart.” They killed him then, cutting him into small pieces, because they were afraid that people would take his body as relics. Then they murdered all the Christians in the church: 222 men, women, and children.

Among the martyrs was his son’s fiancée, Maria, who had not been in the church. The following day she went to the churchyard with a cloth to collect some of the blood as a relic, but the Boxers were still there and wounded her with a sword, saying, “If you deny your faith, you can keep your life.” She replied, “I am very glad to die for Jesus Christ, like my husband and my father-in-law,” and she did.

Afterwards, a few remaining Orthodox Christians collected the relics, but because the bodies had been cut into pieces, they didn’t know who was who. They gathered the remains into boxes and buried them in a small memori-

al chapel in the Orthodox mission area of Beijing where, a year later, they built another chapel dedicated to the Holy Martyrs of Beijing.

RTE: Do people still go there to venerate the relics?

IOANNIS: I will tell you. In the middle of the chapel, in front of the royal doors, was the sepulchre containing the relics. People went there to pray and many miracles occurred through the intercession of the martyrs. This chapel existed until the 1960’s, when it was destroyed in the Cultural Revolution. I have heard that the relics were removed and that Orthodox Christians reburied them in the Russian cemetery. Of course, they could not say that these were relics, they just pretended that they were reburying the remains of relatives. The Russian cemetery itself was destroyed a few years later during a period of tension between the Soviet and Chinese communist governments. Now the cemetery is covered by a golf course.

RTE: And the relics of the martyrs are still there, under the golf course?

IOANNIS: Yes, although we don’t know where exactly. We would have to buy the golf course to have the right to dig it up, and this is nearly impossible. Sometimes, we walk around the golf course and pray, but we can’t have an official service.

RTE: At least you know where they are.

IOANNIS: Yes, and I believe that we will find them someday, just as St. Helena found the Cross. We will pray and the new martyrs will help.

RTE: Of course. Were there any small pieces of relics kept elsewhere?

IOANNIS: No, they were all buried there for safekeeping during the Cultural Revolution. No one knew that the cemetery would be destroyed.

CHINESE SAINTS’ NAMES

RTE: Will you explain why, since China has hundreds of new martyrs, that you haven’t followed the old custom of using their Chinese names so that we would have new names added to the list of saints and martyrs that could be used as baptismal names.

IOANNIS: In China, saints’ names are used in both the Catholic and the

Orthodox churches. Of course, the Protestants have no tradition of using saints' names, but both Catholic and Orthodox Christians use double names. We use the Christian name in church, to receive Holy Communion, baptism, marriage, but in school, at work, in official documents we always use our Chinese name. A few people use their Christian name (their saint's name) in Chinese translation as their legal name, but this is unusual.

Also, in the Chinese language every symbol or "letter," every character is one syllable, so usually, most of the Chinese family names are just one syllable, like Li, or Wong, or Chang. A few of them have two symbols. For the given name, we use one or two, but never three.

RTE: So, there would never be more than four syllables in any full name.

IOANNIS: Yes. If someone uses more than four syllables, he is usually from Tibet or Mongolia. It is also very strange to use the Chinese translation of a saint's name in social life. It would be as if in Russia, a Russian called himself Mike instead of Mikhail or Misha.

RTE: Yes, it wouldn't work. I understand about the size of the names, but in early Christian tradition, for example, if someone was baptized John, and their civil, pre-Christian name had been Achilles, if they were martyred, their original name was added to the pool of names that could be picked from for baptism. Their original non-Christian name was sanctified by their death.

IOANNIS: Of course, but in the Chinese tradition we cannot use the family name such as Chang. You couldn't baptize someone by his family name; it would be like baptizing someone Smith. As for the first name, in China when you respect someone, you do not use his first name again, you avoid using it. For us, *not* to use the first name again is a sign of respect. In the West it is the other way around.

Also, in traditional Chinese families, like my own, we never say the first name of our parents or grandparents aloud. When my grandfather was alive and he had to write the symbol that was the name of his mother or father, he wrote this symbol a little differently. For example, instead of Maria, he would have written Mari..., without the last letter. He said, "I so respect my father and grandfather that I don't repeat their names or even write them." People reading it understood that he did this out of respect. Now it is only the old people who keep the custom of not writing the name. The young people laugh at them, but this is why we don't use the martyrs' given names.

Also, we don't want to have people in the village or in the school with the same name.

RTE: How do you come up with names?

IOANNIS: My Chinese name was given to me by my grandfather. Before my birth, he went through the dictionary and found two symbols to name me. Now, my grandmother says that my name was from a dream he had, but he always said, "Don't you believe that old woman!" (*laughter*). Nevertheless, Grandmother said that he had a dream of the sun rising over a high mountaintop, and after this he named me Eu Fan, the first of which means "to shine," and the second, "from the top of the mountain."

We feel very strongly about having a unique name and every couple wants their child to have something very special. Even if the baby is several years old, if the parents find someone else with the name they have chosen, they will rename the child. You hope that in your city there will be no copies, but not everyone is educated enough to come up with an original name and many characters in the language do not work as names. You do sometimes find people of the same name, but parents try to create something unique and beautiful for each child.

Some people even try to make new Christian names. Just as Dorotheos is "Gift of God," I have heard Chinese Christian names like Philangelos, "Friend of the Angels," or "Stavroforos," which means, "Cross-bearer." This is in Greek, of course, but we also do it in Slavonic. Also, we use names that are rarely given in the West except to monks, like the Old Testament prophets: Jeremiah, Zechariah, Isaac. Another example is the subdeacon Papias (Papi in Chinese), from one of the early disciples of St. John the Theologian.

RESURRECTING THE CHURCH: FROM BEIJING TO MONGOLIA

IOANNIS: In the 1980's, after the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese Orthodox Church was forgotten, but in the 1990's, both the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Church Abroad began paying attention to these small communities. Archbishop Hilarion of ROCOR in Australia has been to Beijing several times to baptize babies and old people in their homes and in the hotels, and also to give them Holy Communion. He could not serve liturgy because he is not native Chinese, but he did bring Holy Communion for the sick.



Also, Fr. Dionisy Pozdnyaev from the Moscow Patriarchate has been to Beijing several times. Last Christmas he served a full vigil and liturgy in the Russian Embassy, which is officially Russian territory.

RTE: Was this the first liturgy in China since the Cultural Revolution?

IOANNIS: For Beijing, I believe so. I heard that about fifty people confessed, baptized their children and received Holy Communion. One of the Orthodox from Beijing told me that after the service, an old man went back home and recited the prayer of St. Simeon, “Now, lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace...” and then said to his children, “If God takes my soul this night, I will not be sorry because I’ve received Holy Communion.”

RTE: May God bless him.

IOANNIS: Yes, you see, the situation is slowly improving. Fr. Vladimir, a priest under Archbishop Hilarion, has also been to Beijing; Fr. Dionisy has been to Beijing and Harbin, to the town of Lap Da Lin and even to several small villages in Manchuria and Mongolia, trying to help. There, the local government gives more freedom to Orthodox people — there are several mixed Russian-Chinese villages and many people have some Russian blood. The local government wants to show good-will to the neighboring Russians, and in several

small villages they have allowed churches to be built. Five years ago, people petitioned for a new Orthodox church be built in the town of Lap Da Lin, and it was. There is room for about three hundred people, but the church itself is empty. It has no iconostasis, no holy table, nothing to serve with.

RTE: The government built the church for them?

IOANNIS: The government paid to have it built. But, of course, the people of the village can only build the building. They cannot paint icons or consecrate an altar. Fr. Vladimir did what he could there without serving liturgy: blessed the water, baptized, and gave Holy Communion. I’m sure that Fr. Dionisy has been there also. In several Manchurian villages and also in Xin Jiang, churches have been rebuilt. This is the situation in the north.

Harbin is also very interesting. For centuries, it was just a provincial town in northeastern China, but grew rapidly when Russian émigrés settled there after the 1917 Russian Revolution. You can still see many old Russian-style buildings. In the center of Harbin were thirty-six parish churches and two monasteries. About ten or fifteen still remain.

RTE: Have any been reopened?

IOANNIS: Just one, *Pokrov*, dedicated to the Protection of the Mother of God.

Also in Harbin was the Church of Hagia Sophia, the largest church in the Far East, even bigger than the Orthodox cathedral of Tokyo. Also, St. Nicholas, a wonderful wooden church that was the seat of the bishop; the very famous and beautiful Church of the Annunciation; and the Iveron chapel, but those three were destroyed.

RTE: And Hagia Sophia?

IOANNIS: I will tell you in a moment. In 1984, the government gave back one church, dedicated to the Protection of the Mother of God, which was built by Ukrainians. After *Pokrov* was reopened, a new chapel, dedicated to the Dormition of the Mother of God, was built in the Orthodox cemetery. At that time there were two priests serving in Harbin. The morning *Pokrov* reopened, Archimandrite Bai (I don't remember his Christian name) and Fr. Gregory Chiu served liturgy and had a cross procession with icons. About one hundred people attended the service chanting traditional hymns in Slavonic and Chinese; not only natives of Harbin, but Orthodox from cities and villages throughout Manchuria. Archimandrite Bai soon reposed, but Fr. Gregory Chiu continued to serve by himself for sixteen years.

In October of 2000 I was in Beijing, arranging my visa for my first visit to Greece. I very much wanted to meet Fr. Gregory, but when I arrived in Harbin I was told, "We buried him last week." They showed me photos of his funeral and said that the last time he had served was the previous Pascha.

RTE: Did he serve during the Cultural Revolution?

IOANNIS: No, of course not. He was forced to work at a secular job. There have been no more priests after Fr. Gregory. *Pokrov* is still the only officially open Orthodox church in China. The small village churches that I spoke of in Manchuria are legal, but without as many privileges as the parish church of *Pokrov*. For the past two years, the faithful of Harbin have had no priest, no liturgy. They just go to church to light a candle every Sunday and read prayers by themselves.

RTE: You said that the Catholic churches recovered more quickly. Did many Orthodox end up there?

IOANNIS: I know of only four who became Catholic. The Orthodox people don't know much theology, they don't know church history, they don't know

about the *filioque*; they have simpler reasons for not going to the Catholic church. For example, they think it is wrong that the Catholics make the cross from the left to the right. After the Second Vatican Council, when the priest and altar were turned to face west, towards the people, the Orthodox thought, "How can he face the West, when the light comes from the East?" and "How can he serve without an iconostasis?" Their reasons were simple, practical ones, not theological.

There were also new martyrs in Harbin during the Cultural Revolution. I only know one by name, Fr. Stephanos. After our 1949 Communist Revolution, he left Harbin for Hong Kong and served there for several years. Later, he felt strongly that he should return to mainland China. He went back to Harbin and served until the Cultural Revolution in 1966. At the beginning of the revolution he suffered at the hands of the Red Guards. This is a very sad story because the Red Guards were basically teenagers, students from middle schools and universities. They were used by the wife of Mao Zedong, and Mao himself, to destroy our traditional culture and many innocent people. The students themselves were innocent...they were used. A group of them went to the church and beat Fr. Stephanos with sticks for several hours until he died. His relics are buried in an Orthodox cemetery in the countryside near Harbin, near the grave of Fr. Gregory Chiu. I was able to visit his grave. Stephanos, means "crown," you know, and he really was crowned by Christ.

HAGIA SOPHIA IN HARBIN

IOANNIS: Another remarkable thing is that in 1998, Harbin citizens (not Orthodox people, but non-Christians) asked the government to restore the great Orthodox church of Hagia Sophia, which had been closed in the 1960's. For the people of Harbin, Hagia Sophia is like Notre Dame to the Parisians. They said, "We love this church and we remember her glorious past. We are not Christians, but we respect her. She is the symbol of our city and our life. We have lived and played around her since we were children, and now she is falling down and we want her to be saved." There were so many requests that the government listened.

I was very moved when the newspapers reported that the authorities had decided to restore Hagia Sophia. A box was put in front of the church and thousands of people, most of them non-Christians, stood in long lines to put

money into it. Many students, even small children, held boxes in the street to collect donations. They said, “We all remember the glory of this great church, we love her as our mother and our grandmother.” And so, the government rebuilt the church.

RTE: May God bless them.

IOANNIS: Yes. After this there were different ideas about what should be done. Many people in Harbin said, “It should be given back to the Orthodox Church because she belonged to the Church, and she is a church.” But it was impossible at the time. The government replied, “We have paid a lot of money, and we are not an Orthodox government.”

RTE: So, they rebuilt it as a cultural monument and not as a church?

IOANNIS: Yes. Also, Fr. Gregory Chiu, the only priest in Harbin, was very ill and he had no energy to take over the duties of such a large church. At that time, the Moscow Patriarchate offered to send a priest for the church, but the government was very cautious about foreigners coming in. So, for different reasons, they refused. However, they did agree to rebuild it in an Orthodox style, exactly as the original, and they put a golden cross on every dome.

RTE: That’s as much a miracle as the Russian government giving back Russia’s churches in the 1990’s.

IOANNIS: For me, it is an important symbol. Although Hagia Sophia is still a museum, the government did put up crosses — the symbol of Christian victory — on the domes of the church. They even asked the faithful of the parish church of *Pokrov* to help them with the correct design of the Russian Orthodox cross. This is like the conversion of Emperor Constantine, and I believe that through *dynamis*, by the spiritual power of the holy cross, the Church will revive.

The government not only put crosses on the dome, but they also remade the bells. Six large bells were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and only one small one survived. The new bells were recast by non-Christians, but the government commissioned them to follow the style of the small remaining bell to cast the other six. Now they have one very large and five smaller bells, which they arranged in their original order in the bell-tower.

Also, the authorities allowed the teachers and the students of the art school to paint an icon of the *Deisis* — the Lord enthroned in the middle,



The restored Church of Hagia Sophia in Harbin.

with the Mother of God and St. John the Baptist on either side — on the front wall of the church. Inside the church on the right, they painted a large icon of Christ and inscribed the Lord's name in the Slavonic style. To the left is an icon of the Theotokos. In the narthex they painted the Martyr Sophia with her three daughters, and Emperor Constantine and St. Helena on the pillars. They were all carefully copied from early Russian icons, using the Byzantine-Kievan style.

Another area of the church they use as a museum, where they have a display of historical photos of the original church and old Harbin. The original fresco in the cupola was half-destroyed, but the government hasn't allowed it to be restored yet. They say, "We do not yet have the expertise to repair it, and we want to wait and repair it in the Christian way." You can still see the old fragments, like in Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.

So, this is the situation of Hagia Sophia today. Before Pascha of this year, I read articles by Catholics requesting that the church be given back to the Orthodox, and I've also read editorials by *non-Christians* in the city newspapers saying, "We have rebuilt Hagia Sophia, but we have only clothed her, she does not yet have a soul. We hope that she will soon resurrect with her true soul — the Divine Liturgy."

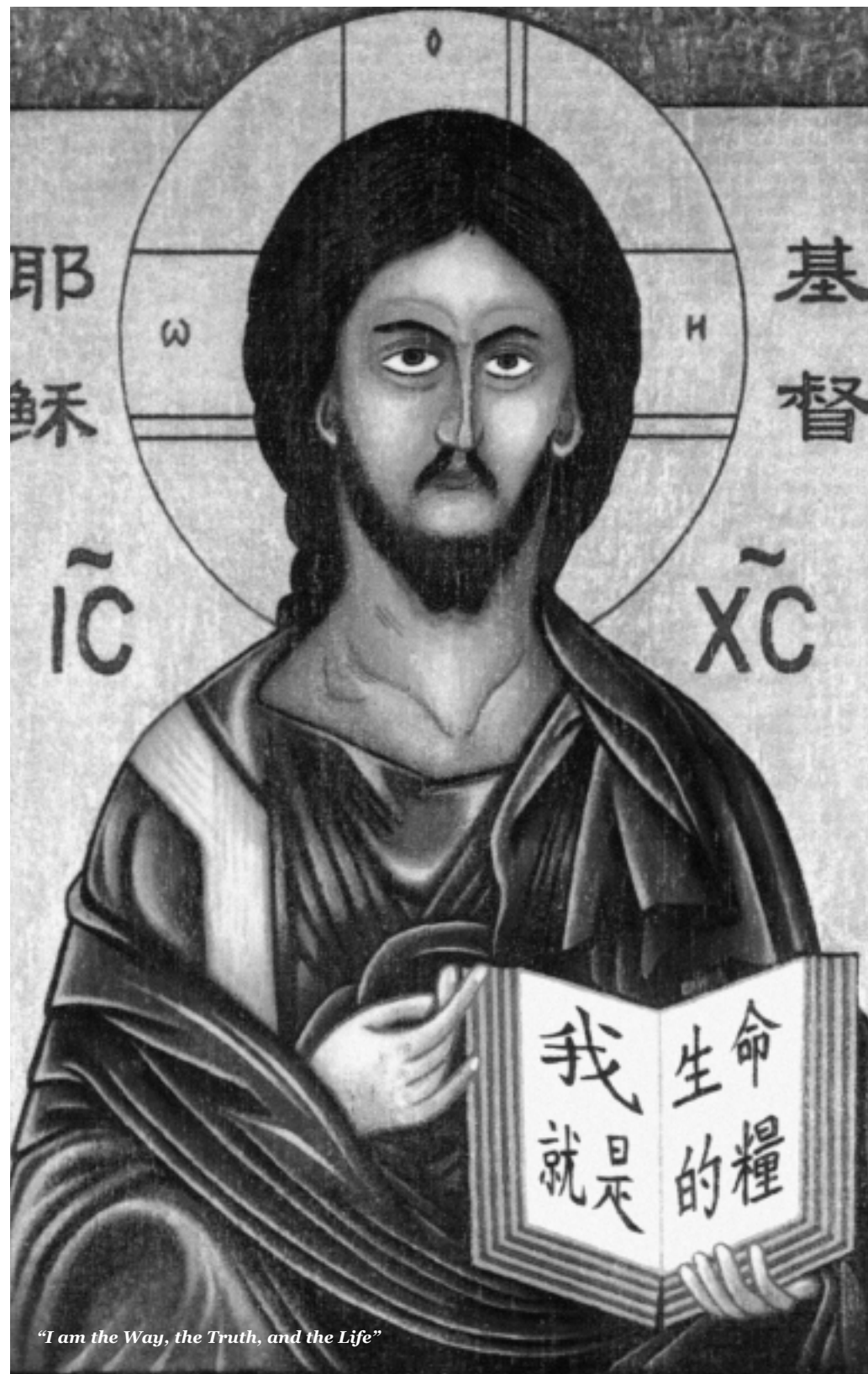
RTE: Incredible.

IOANNIS: Yes. Now I want to tell you another interesting story. In Harbin, there is an Orthodox church with red walls, also very beautiful, but more in the Baroque style with Russian domes called *Alexiev...*

RTE: After St. Alexis, Man of God?

IOANNIS: I'm not sure. It is presently being used by the Catholics of Harbin because the Catholic cathedral was destroyed. The Catholics of Harbin were not as numerous as the Orthodox and they only had a few churches, so after the Cultural Revolution, when the Catholics wanted to rebuild, the government said, "There are many old Orthodox Churches, take this one." But the Catholics went to their bishop and said, "Don't do this. This church belongs to the Orthodox, it is protected by their own saint and we can't take it." The bishop was sympathetic but said, "What can I do? I must follow the government's order."

Even now, the local Catholics don't like this and they tell us, "This church



must become Orthodox again.” The Catholic priest doesn’t serve mass in the same place that the Orthodox served liturgy, nor does he enter the old sanctuary. They divided the church into two floors, and he serves on the upper floor.

ARCHBISHOP JOHN MAXIMOVITCH AND THE CHURCHES OF SHANGHAI

RTE: I understand that the Surety of Sinners Cathedral, built by Archbishop John in Shanghai, still stands as well.

IOANNIS: Yes. During the Cultural Revolution this building was used for different things. For several years it was a living space, and later it was renovated.

I can tell you my own experience with this church. My grandmother lived in an old house near Archbishop John’s cathedral, and when I was a small child I played there, on the steps of this church. What exactly an Orthodox church was remained a mystery to me, and this church was always closed. Many times, my playmates and I stood on each other’s shoulders trying to look through the windows. I remember that once I saw some Slavonic sentences around the door and I tried to copy them. I was very young and had no idea that Slavonic was a language. The words were like pictures for me. Years later, at the end of the 1980’s and in the early 1990’s, the government began to repair the church, although not in the Christian style and for other uses.

People in Shanghai, especially the old woman, like to tell the news themselves. They don’t have jobs, and they like to talk. This is called “street news.” When I heard from the street news that this church was to be reopened, I was so happy. I wasn’t Orthodox at that time, I was Catholic, but I felt an inner warmth, like a flame, pushing me to go there. I didn’t live with my grandmother and my own home was very far from the cathedral, but every Sunday for months I went to see what was happening. After six months the repair work finished, and I waited anxiously for the reopening of the church. It finally reopened, but not for services. It opened as a financial exchange center, like a bank. Two years later, the business moved, and I heard that Russians living in Shanghai had complained to the government, “This is a sacred place and must be respected. How can you use it for financial dealings?” I don’t know if this is true or not, but the situation did change. The government announced, “We have another plan for this building,” but until now it is empty.

RTE: Perhaps St. John Maximovitch is protecting it.

IOANNIS: Yes, I believe so. Before Pascha this year, I entered the church to check on it. I secretly gave the doorkeeper a little money and he let me in to look. This building also is divided into two floors, but it would be very easy to remove the false ceiling. In the sanctuary, everything is intact, although, of course, the iconostasis and the holy altar are gone.

RTE: Are there frescoes on the walls?

IOANNIS: No, but someone said that during the Cultural Revolution they didn’t destroy the frescoes, they just whitewashed over them. Later, the walls were plastered. Perhaps they can be restored, I’m not sure. Until now the church is empty, and we pray to God that it will be restored. Also, our very beloved and beautiful Church of St. Nicholas is now a French restaurant.

RTE: Oh, no.

IOANNIS: Yes, the Church of St. Nicholas is also divided into two floors, but the Frenchman who owns it (some say he is German) is not very friendly to us. He is a businessman; he is civil, but he isn’t happy to talk with us. He covered up the frescos and had someone paint unclothed pagan goddesses on the walls. One Christian told me that when he and a few others went inside to see, they crossed themselves and said, “Lord, have mercy, what happened? Here was the icon of St. Nicholas, there was the Mother of God, but what is this now, women without clothes?” The owner also put a table for food inside the altar. Strangely, this table is more expensive than the others. When I talked to him about it he said, “I paid the government for this building. If you want to take it back, you will have to pay me double.”

RTE: We will have to pray that someone can buy it. Is there anyone in Shanghai who remembers Archbishop John Maximovitch?

IOANNIS: Yes, but we don’t have many stories, because the people who remember him were very young then. I’ve heard them say that St. John was a very humble man, and even little children could say, “Come here!” and he would come, or “Go there!” and he would go. They also remember that although Bishop Simeon, who came later, was very tall, St. John was very short. They all say that he was very kind and loving.

THE XIN JIANG ICON OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

RTE: You've told us what happened to the relics of the Chinese martyrs. Were there miracle-working icons in China as well?

IOANNIS: China had at least three famous icons, perhaps more. One was the Mother of God of Albazin, the "*Albazinskaya*." I'm not sure where the original was, perhaps in Manchuria, but there are many copies. A second is the Mother of God of Lu Shun. Lu Shun is another city in China. A third icon, which we simply called "the Miracle-Working Icon of the Mother of God," was in the town of Yi-Ning in Xin Jiang. This is the one I know about.

After the 1917 revolution, Russians brought the icon to Xin Jiang province and built a church in Yi-Ning where they enshrined it. (I'm not sure what type it was, because people just called it, "The Wonder-Working Icon of the Mother of God.") One day, because they were upset by the construction of the church, a group of local Muslims entered the church and the *imam* gashed the icon on the face with a knife. The face of the Mother of God began to bleed and the *imam* was so terrified that he ran out of the church with the others close behind. Needless to say, the people of the city, both Christian and non-Christian venerated this icon very much and there were many miracles, one of which was that the wound on the face of the icon healed by itself. Although the Orthodox Christians venerated this icon with love, I think others did so with fear.

My friend Andre's grandmother, Nina, saw the blood flowing from the wounded icon and she had her first child baptized in this church. Nina's father had been a general in the White Russian army, and they still have an old photo of him with several other men, carrying the icon on their shoulders in a Pascha procession.

The icon remained in the church until the terrible Cultural Revolution when it was taken by young Red Guards and thrown into a fire. Some of the eyewitnesses who are still alive say that the icon was not burnt, it simply disappeared in the midst of the flames. There is a local tradition in Xin Jiang that when Orthodoxy is reestablished and people are free, the icon will reappear.

I myself don't care if the icon comes back in a miraculous way or in a normal way — that is, if it is repainted — because every icon is a miracle. The real miracle is the survival of the Chinese Orthodox Church, that by the grace of God and the prayers of the saints we have been able to keep the tradition alive.



“TO LOVE AND BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST”

RTE: Can you tell us now about your own life?

IOANNIS: I grew up in a Protestant family because my grandmother is a pious Christian. She was the only Christian in the family but, as you may know, in the Chinese tradition the grandmother is a very strong figure. Because of this, when I was a small child I went to a Protestant church almost every Sunday. I was not baptized, though, because Chinese Protestants are usually evangelical and do not baptize children.

When I was about twelve, I wanted to be baptized very much and Grandmother took me to the pastor, who said, “You are too young, you have to wait.” I was angry, and replied, “But I want to be baptized, and the Lord Jesus Christ said, ‘Don’t forbid the children to come to Me,’ and ‘the Kingdom of God belongs to children.’” The pastor listened with pleasure, but the final answer was no. He gave me many theological reasons, but they weren’t very helpful to a young boy. Theology is theology, but the greatest mystery is love. I wanted to receive this sacrament with love and I knew that no one should refuse me.

I was so unhappy that I didn’t go to church for almost a year; I only prayed at home. When I was thirteen, I entered middle school and bought a series of books on the history of the Christian Church. I began to read them slowly and I was very surprised. The Protestant church has lost so many traditions, and not only traditions but many important beliefs. I found that I not only needed baptism, but also Holy Communion, which doesn’t really exist in the Protestant churches. In Shanghai there were many Protestant and Catholic Churches, and it was very easy for me to find a Catholic parish. So, I began to attend mass. I didn’t tell my Protestant friends or my family, but after a year I decided to be baptized Catholic. When I told my grandmother, she wasn’t against it. She said, “The most important thing is to love and believe in Jesus Christ.” I cannot say that this is only a Protestant view. It is right. It’s a good view...

However, my father was very against this decision; perhaps he was afraid I would become a priest. Nevertheless, with the support of my grandmother I was baptized Catholic. After middle school, I went to the university to study philology and economics and then entered the Catholic seminary in Shanghai, as my father had perhaps foreseen. I began studying Latin, and after a year I could read the Church Fathers and liturgical texts with the

help of a dictionary. However, I soon found myself in a dilemma. Liturgical reform had begun in China and everyone was confused.

RTE: Catholic liturgical reform in the U.S. and Europe started in the 1960’s, after Vatican II. Why was it so late in coming to China?

IOANNIS: It only began in Shanghai in the 1990’s, when the Catholics could once again communicate with the Vatican and world Catholicism. They had been forced to accept autonomy as the national Chinese Catholic Church, which was very difficult for them. In Orthodoxy it is normal to have this decentralization, but in Catholicism there is no context for it. If you are not under the authority of Rome, you are not Catholic.

I was very confused, as were many people, and the Catholic Church entered a difficult period. I studied Latin intensely to find an answer to this confusion in the writings of the Holy Fathers, the early Christian saints, bishops, teachers, and the liturgical texts. It was extremely difficult at first, but I finally realized that some of the changes my church was going through weren’t in line with the teaching of the fathers, and I was uncomfortable with this. Of course, Catholics would say that the theological emphasis changed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but, nevertheless, I felt it wasn’t quite orthodox, in the general meaning of the word.

RTE: How did you know what was orthodox? Had you already discovered modern Orthodoxy, or were you just feeling from your reading that there were some discrepancies?

IOANNIS: It was the reading, combined with many small things. One simple example was that, at that time in Shanghai, the Catholic church turned the altar around to face the people. It happened overnight, with no explanation. The priest himself did not know why. He told us to ask the bishop, and when we seminarians did ask the bishop, he said to ask the pope. This was upsetting to many Chinese, as the east and west symbolize two very different things. Christian altars have always traditionally faced east, towards Jerusalem. The Holy Fathers also wrote about why we face east in prayer, that we reject the darkness from the west. This goes very far back in scripture, but I found that many Western Christians didn’t seem to mind the change; they didn’t think it was important.

There were many things like this, and it was not just the technical, physical problem of whether you face east or west, but, inwardly, I sensed a dif-

ferent spirit entering the church and I was afraid. I went to my spiritual director in the seminary, not to try to force answers from him, but to find some peace of heart. My spiritual father was a very good man, with a good mind, but he was also confused and had lost inner peace over the changes.

Finally, I decided to leave the seminary. The director of the seminary was very surprised at my decision and talked to me all night, but I finally said, “Father, I’m sorry, I have to leave.”

Afterwards I returned to the university to continue my study of philology. I did a lot of thinking during this time, not only about my own future, but about the future of the Church. I couldn’t forget the light I had found in the writings of the Holy Fathers. So one day I took the books and my questions to my friend, Andreas. I was surprised to find that he felt the same. He was still in the seminary, and we decided to call Fr. Gregory Chiu in Harbin, at *Pokrov*, which we knew was the only open Orthodox church in China. He was the last Orthodox priest still serving, our last hope in mainland China.

Everyone in China who has an interest in religion knows about this church. There are ten thousand Catholic and Protestant churches, but only one Orthodox church. His answer was, “I’m sorry, I am very old and sick, and I can’t come to Shanghai to see you. If you come to Harbin, perhaps I can baptize you, but I’m not sure.” He was already dying.

Finally, Andreas and I decided to contact the Greek Metropolitan of Hong Kong, Nikitas, who after several months came to Shanghai and baptized Andreas and me, my cousin, my mother, and Andreas’ sister.

RTE: How did you find him?

IOANNIS: Simply. Through the Hong Kong Yellow Pages in the library.

I was eventually baptized and later decided to study for the priesthood. I have to say, though, that this isn’t exactly a continuation of my desire to be a priest when I was Catholic. I have a different mind about it now. Liturgy is no longer confusing; it’s a peaceful, wonderful grace for me and I feel that I can serve with all my heart.

RTE: I’m very glad. What are your hopes for the Chinese Church in the near future?

IOANNIS: I am not a prophet but I hope that Chinese Orthodox clergymen will soon be ordained to serve and rebuild the churches. I also hope that we will have our own bishop. I don’t care what level he is on: bishop, archbishop, metropolitan, but since the government only accepts native Chinese clergy, if we don’t have our own bishops, we will have to seek ordination outside of China, which would be very difficult.



Fr. Dionysy Pozdnyaev at home service in China.



Fr. Gregory Chiu, shortly before his repose, with Fr. Dionysy.

RTE: Will the government allow you to seek ordination outside of China?

IOANNIS: As of now, I have no permission from the government, so my trip to Greece is half-secret. Of course, it is not a secret. I left Shanghai legally. The government knows I am a student, but we still have no clear permission for ordination and I don't think that the government would be willing to have the Orthodox Church in China led by foreigners, even if they live elsewhere.

TOWARDS A CHINESE HIERARCHY

RTE: Could someone become a bishop outside of China, and then go back to China to ordain priests?

IOANNIS: Yes, of course, if we elect someone to be bishop, he will have to be ordained outside of China, but the first step is to ordain two or three priests to replace Fr. Gregory Chiu, because the *Pokrov* church is still the only officially recognized Orthodox parish in China.

RTE: If you or someone else were ordained in a foreign country, would the government allow you to serve?

IOANNIS: I think so. As long as we are native Chinese citizens and it is obvious that we are loyal, that we are not spies, that we have not been sent by another government, I think we could serve in China.

The government itself is trying to find a solution for this situation because after the death of Fr. Gregory, the people of his parish asked many times for a priest, for permission to bring one in. The government can do nothing, however, because of the law. Some officials in the religion department have even said, "You can ordain a priest yourselves," but of course we cannot do this. We are not Protestants. Until we have our own bishop we cannot say that China has a true apostolic link as a national church.

As I said, the first step is to ordain native priests, and the second is to rebuild the churches, to reawaken those who were Orthodox by birth, or as part of their family heritage, and to receive new people who want to join us. It all goes hand in hand. In order to be recognized by the government, to receive permission to rebuild and function openly, the Ministry of Religion needs to see that there are many Orthodox Christians — worldly numbers, not only spiritual power, unfortunately.

In Shanghai, for example, if our community was as large as the Catholic and Protestant communities, the government could not refuse our requests to take back our churches. What could they do? Push us into the river? Of course not.

RTE: Do you see ordination coming through different Orthodox patriarchates?

IOANNIS: Of course. Any Orthodox patriarchate has a right to start a mission in China. I respect the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Church Outside of Russia, as well as the Greeks, Antiocheans and Serbs, but the problem is, as a Chinese Orthodox Christian, I'm afraid of a situation where foreign Orthodox will not only bring Orthodoxy, but also jurisdictional fighting. This would be very bad. This is not like America with its many immigrants. In any one geographical area we are all the same race, we speak the same language, we have almost identical cultural customs. It would be very stupid to fight among ourselves as to who is better.

RTE: From what I understand, that was one of the problems that led to the Boxer Rebellion. There was a colonial attitude on the part of many of the foreigners, including some of the Christian missionaries, and this offended the Chinese.

IOANNIS: Yes, but the Orthodox martyrs were killed purely for their faith. The Orthodox community was the smallest Christian group in China; they were not Western, they were native Chinese and Russian. It is true, though, that western missionaries did not always respect Chinese culture. Spanish or French priests often tried to mold Christian communities along Spanish and French models as in Latin America. It was the same in the Philippines: they built a Latin nation in Asia. I am very glad that China didn't become a second Philippines, where you can no longer find the original local culture. That was very sad for me to see.

RTE: Did the Orthodox do that, too?

IOANNIS: No. First, because the Orthodox have traditionally followed a more humble way to preach the gospel. The liturgy was always put into the local language as quickly as possible, and people's cultural traditions were respected. Look at the icon of Jesus Christ — every Orthodox country in the world has icons in which He looks like a native of that country. They use

their own artistic traditions. Second, even if Russian clergy at the Chinese mission had wanted to impose their culture, they didn't have enough money or clergy. It was a very small community.

Actually, I hope that more and more Orthodox Christians living outside of China will become involved in mission work for the Chinese people. There are many Protestants and Roman Catholics working in China, but not many Orthodox. We not only need money, but we need help in many ways. For example, in Lap Da Lin the government helped rebuild the Orthodox Church but there is no way to get icons, altars, an iconostasis. If people could donate icons and church goods this would be very beneficial. And again, although we welcome Orthodox from everywhere to assist our small and poor Chinese Orthodox community, please leave your jurisdictional differences behind.

RTE: The other thing we can do is to pray for you.

IOANNIS: Yes, that is the most important thing.

TRANSLATING THE SERVICES

RTE: Have the services been translated into Chinese?

IOANNIS: The work of translating the services followed the establishment of the mission in Beijing. In the 300 years of Orthodoxy in China, many Chinese and Russian priests worked hard at this. Unfortunately, some of these translations were destroyed during the Communist Revolution, others during the Cultural Revolution, and many that remain are not so useful for today.

RTE: Why not?

IOANNIS: Over the centuries there were varying ideas of translation. In the scattered texts we have left, some of the services (or even parts of the same service) are translated into ancient Chinese, others into the Chinese of two centuries ago, and still others into local dialects. They are completely different. We cannot put them together and say, "These are the Orthodox service books."

RTE: It would be like us mixing old Anglo-Saxon with Latin, Chaucer, King James English, Robert Burns' poetry, and modern American.

IOANNIS: Yes. Also, although I can find the common parts of the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, and the Sunday Matins and Vespers, I cannot use



Great Wall of China.

them. Without the *Menaion*, without the *Octoechos* and our other books, I cannot even do a reader's service of Matins and Vespers. So, this is why I am now translating everything from the beginning. The translations from the past are unusable and not understandable to modern Chinese. Of course, I've received some good ideas from these older translations and I use them as a reference, but we need something more consistent.

RTE: As a trained philologist, are you using modern Chinese, or are you using something older that has reverent overtones, like our more formal King James English?

IOANNIS: My translation is in modern Chinese. You know that traditional Orthodox countries, except for Romania, have always used the contemporary language and the older liturgical language side by side: Slavonic for Russia, Bulgaria and Serbia, ecclesiastical Greek for Greece, but this wouldn't work in China. It would be artificial to try to create an ecclesiastical language. The language of the New Testament and the language of the Greek liturgical texts at the time of the Holy Fathers was the daily language. This is why ecclesiastical Greek is not identical to ancient Greek, because the Holy Fathers didn't use the language from before Christ, they used the language of their own time. In the same way, as we begin the work of translation, we translate into the language of our time. Of course, we follow a gracious way of translating, using beautiful and venerable words, but this does not mean that we must use ancient Chinese.

RTE: Are you translating into Mandarin?

IOANNIS: Yes. Mandarin is the only official language for all of China, and most of China speaks this one language. The variants of Shanghaiese and Cantonese are not separate languages; they are just local dialects of Mandarin. Even if we wanted to, it is impossible to translate into Shanghaiese or Cantonese because they do not have a unique grammar; they just use different pronunciations.

RTE: What are you working on now?

IOANNIS: I am trying to finish a simple service book that will include the Liturgies of St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil the Great, Presanctified Liturgy, the *proskomedie*, and the preparation and thanksgiving prayers for Holy Communion. I have already translated the baptism and marriage

services, confession, holy unction... the sacraments. I hope to finish it soon. I am also working on a daily prayer book for lay people, as well as a book for catechumens on Orthodoxy.

Many years ago a priest from Shanghai wrote a catechism, but this was in a question-and-answer form. Many Orthodox topics, however, do not fit into one simple dogmatic answer, so I have tried to write articles on things that people would be interested in, like the differences between Orthodoxy and the other Christian churches, how you conduct yourself in church, the veneration of icons, how to make *metanias* (bows and prostrations), what the difference is between *antidoron* and Holy Communion. These things are practical but important. It is better to address things that people can see, that they are curious about. You can't start from pure theology; you have to start more simply.

After these books are finished, I want to begin working on the *Festal Menaion* and the *Lenten Triodion*, and go on to the daily services for the saints and the whole cycle of the liturgical year.

RTE: Can you explain to me, as a non-Chinese speaker, how you translate Orthodox theological terms?

IOANNIS: Sometimes I use the characters that are also used by Protestants and Roman Catholics, but not always. For example, in referring to the Mother of God with the Greek theological term of *Theotokos*, or "God-bearer," the Chinese Catholic Church doesn't use this. They've translated the Latin forms of *Mater Dei* (Mother of God) or *Dei Genetrix* (Birthgiver of God), but they aren't quite the same as *Theotokos*. So, I made a new word. Of course, it is according to the linguistic rules and people understand it quite easily.

RTE: Does each Chinese character convey a whole idea, or can they also be syllables, like sounds, that together make up words?

IOANNIS: It is difficult to explain. In the Chinese language every character is a symbol and every symbol has only one syllable. Usually every symbol can be used as a word, but also we have words with two, three or four symbols. Nevertheless, every symbol is also a word in itself.

RTE: I know you speak Chinese, Greek and English. Do you speak anything else?

IOANNIS: I have studied Latin but, of course, it is no longer a spoken language.

CHINESE TRADITION AND ORTHODOXY

RTE: What Chinese cultural traditions would you like to see incorporated into the Chinese liturgical practice? For example, in Indonesia, Orthodox Christians take off their shoes before they enter the church. This is an important act of reverence for them. They also read the hours separately from matins and vespers, so that they have more individual services because frequent prayer is a common way of worship in their culture. Do you have practices like this?

IOANNIS: We don't have strong outward traditions like this now in Chinese worship, but it is very important to us to pray for the dead, to pray for our ancestors.

RTE: So perhaps you would have more frequent *pannikhida* memorial services?

IOANNIS: Yes. In the Chinese culture there are special days for remembering your ancestors, for honoring those who have died. This has nothing to do with the Christian liturgical year, but we could serve *pannikhidas* on those days. The Catholics also respect this and have special prayers for the dead on those days. Weddings are also extremely important for us, and perhaps there are Chinese marriage customs that could be incorporated into an Orthodox service or the wedding meal afterwards.

There are also traditions in the Orthodox Church that may be a little difficult for Chinese people at first, such as venerating icons by kissing them, or taking Holy Communion from one spoon. In China, even in the same family, people would never use the same cup or spoon. It's a little impolite. Also, it would be very difficult for them to kiss the forehead of someone who has reposed at a funeral. To the Chinese mind, once the person departs, the dead body is rather ghostly.

It also might be hard for young Chinese girls to confess to priests. I noticed in the Catholic Church that it is often difficult for young girls to confess, but once a woman marries and begins to have a family it is much easier. For young boys, though, it is easy and natural to be close to the priest, but once they are grown or married and the master of a family it is more difficult. The father or grandfather sometimes doesn't want his children to see him confessing because he is afraid it will undermine his authority.



Fr. Dionysy and Matushka Kyra Pozdnyaev,
the photographer.

RTE: That's very human. Are there attitudes that already exist in the Chinese culture that would aid people in becoming traditionally Christian?

IOANNIS: I have to say that most young people today have lost their Chinese values, but also, in my opinion, the level of culture is not so important. For example, some theologians say that it was inevitable that the Orthodox East and the Catholic West divided because they were culturally different, and that the Roman West was more rational. I don't agree with this. They may have been more rational, but I don't believe that this caused the schism. Likewise, we cannot say that the Chinese culture and tradition is spiritually "better" or "higher" than that of India or the Philippines.

Before the tenth century, the Slavs, in the eyes of the Romans and Byzantines, were barbarians. The Romans eventually lost Orthodoxy, but the "barbarian" Slavs received it, and they not only received it, but they developed the tradition. Also, on the mainland of central China, there are traditional ancient cities that are becoming increasingly modern. Christian missionary work is not so successful there, but in some more remote places, the countryside near Vietnam, in the south of China — areas we've always called "barbarian" — there are many more people becoming Christian. So, can I say that their culture is barbaric? We see this everywhere: in Africa, among the aborigines in Australia, among the natives in Alaska. Human nature is the same. We cannot say that one culture is higher than another.

RTE: Yes, I agree, but I'm thinking more about the psychology, the general character traits of Chinese people. For example, in America we are often rather rational, which is good for understanding church history and theological problems, but in coming to Orthodoxy we may be more hesitant about things like wonder-working icons and miracles that are commonly accepted in Russia and Greece. Although you cannot generalize about any country, there are sometimes patterns of thought that help or hinder.

IOANNIS: I see. One thing that makes it easy for Chinese people to come close to Orthodoxy is that Orthodoxy is not quite like western Christianity, which is logical, scholastic, and reasoned. For the Chinese mind, it is easier to accept something practical.

I'm very surprised that so many Chinese people have converted to Protestantism and have lost their Chinese mind. They believe that salvation is only from faith, and works have nothing to do with it, but this is totally opposed

to Chinese tradition. I am sorry to say that they are no longer pure Chinese. For a truly Chinese person, it is impossible to say that salvation comes only from faith while works mean nothing, that guidance is only from the Bible and not from tradition. This is completely against the Chinese way of thinking.

In Chinese philosophical writings before Christ, there are many texts that say that faith alone is not enough. In the teachings of Confucius and other great Chinese teachers, there is nothing that says if you simply worship and believe in a supreme being, you will be saved. They say that you have to walk on the right path, to keep to this way, to seek God; this path includes your duty to society, to your family, to your work. Traditional Chinese religion is mystical, but it is also very practical. Pure meditation is not a Chinese tradition. It is from India.

RTE: We often associate Chinese Buddhism with images of meditating monks.

IOANNIS: Yes, but this is not natural to us as a people. Chinese philosophy has elements that are very close to the teaching of the Holy Fathers. It says that *agape* and *eros*, the pure love of God and material love, are something quite different. In Chinese philosophy, the highest aim is to keep your heart completely calm, but this doesn't mean that a man becomes like a piece of wood, that he sits and meditates all day. This calmness is interior; he can love and help everyone but without material *eros*. This is something very close to Orthodoxy.

In the Roman Catholic spiritual practices that I learned, there wasn't a clear division between *eros* and *agape*. Many times in western meditation, the goal is to use the imagination to bring something alive, like watching a film inside oneself.

RTE: Like in the Ignatian exercises?

IOANNIS: Yes, and this is nearer *eros* than *agape*.

My point is that in the Chinese tradition there are many things that are already Orthodox in form, and it is natural and easy for people to become Orthodox. The difficulty is that almost no Chinese people keep the traditions from before the Cultural Revolution, and western influence has destroyed most of what was left. Every soul has spiritual hunger, of course, but people are trying to fill it with worldliness. In some ways, this materialism has run its course in America, but in China it is just beginning and it is in full force.

For example, the “free love” from the sixties and seventies in the U.S. is now infecting us. It hasn’t finished in the U.S., but as an outward movement it has, and now it is starting with us.

CHALLENGES OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE CULTURE

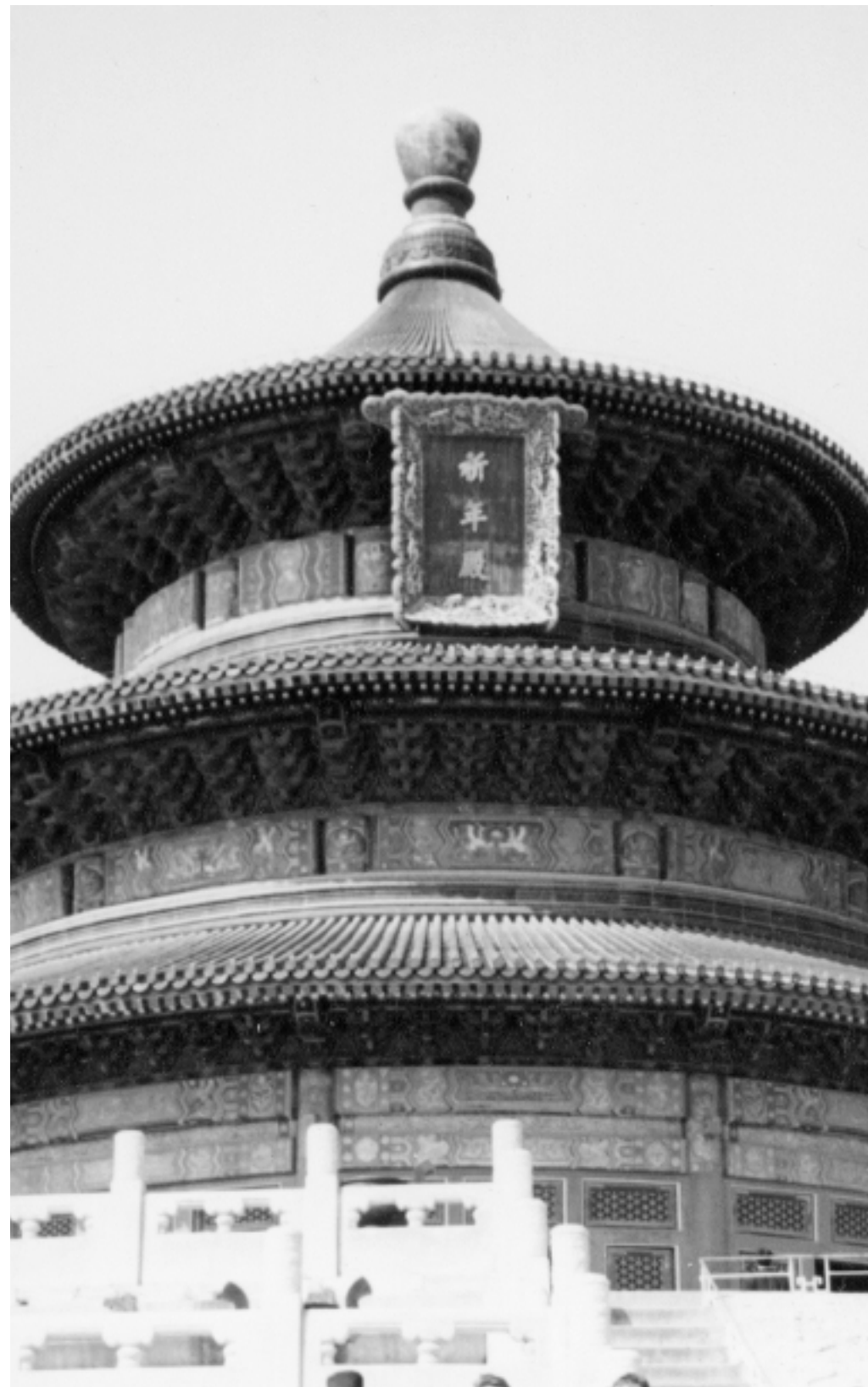
RTE: Speaking of these moral problems, what do Chinese Orthodox and Catholics do about the very difficult policy of the government that limits each family to one child?

IOANNIS: The people who live near the border and have some Russian or Mongolian blood claim an exemption based on their nationality, and the government allows this because they have relatives in a bordering country. The local government cannot control them so strictly, and also the Chinese government doesn’t want to have problems with the Russians. They want to appear liberal and generous, and even to assist people in those areas. Those who live in villages near the border have a better situation, in general, and often the local administrators are not pure Chinese themselves. In the interior of China and among pure Chinese it is more difficult.

RTE: Do they somehow hide the births, or do families have to resort to birth control?

IOANNIS: Faithful Orthodox families now are few. Most of those born after the Communist and Cultural Revolutions have married non-Orthodox and even non-Christians, so this is very difficult. Even if the non-Orthodox partner was willing to become Orthodox, there weren’t priests in many areas to baptize or marry them. Rarely now are a husband and wife both Orthodox. I’ve heard, though, that some Orthodox women who have a second baby will go to another city or to a village in the country to give birth. When they return they will usually only have to pay a fine, although some areas are more strict. China is so large that it is very difficult for the government to govern every region uniformly.

The underground Roman Catholics who remained loyal to the Vatican and refused to join the legal autonomous Catholic Church strictly obey the rule of no contraceptives and no abortions. If you use birth control you have to confess and stop using it before you can have Holy Communion. If you have an abortion you are excommunicated until you repent, and the right to give absolution for this is reserved for the bishop. The clergy in the nation-



al Catholic Church cannot speak out publicly against government policy, but morally, of course, they do not want to say that it is good to use contraceptives. So, their episcopal synod has something like an unwritten policy, and the priests have to give advice in secret. Often they allow birth control as a way to keep people from having abortions.

RTE: On this same subject, in the West when we see pictures of China, there are often huge crowds of people in the streets. Do you feel crowded in China in comparison with other places, or is this just our imagination from the media?

IOANNIS: It is true and not true. More and more people are leaving their villages and going to the big cities, of course.

RTE: Like Athens or New York.

IOANNIS: Yes, all big cities can be very overcrowded, but also there are many beautiful areas of virgin land, very good fertile land untouched by man. No one wants to live there as there are no towns nearby.

RTE: Do you think that the time is ripe for the Chinese to come to Christianity and particularly to Orthodoxy?

IOANNIS: Now many young and middle-aged people are looking for faith because traditional Chinese philosophy and religion have been completely destroyed. The old culture and customs are gone; they are behind us. In cities like Shanghai and Beijing, you can find many things that look traditional, but they are not authentic. After the Cultural Revolution, the government artificially revived them and planted them here and there. Old buildings, folk costumes and traditional dances are only for the foreign tourists; they are no longer in the souls of the people.

This is a good time for Orthodoxy, just as on a piece of blank paper you can write anything you want, but at the same time, people have lost their traditional fear and awe of the divine. Many have become materialists, only believing in money and physical comfort.

RTE: Like everywhere.

IOANNIS: Yes, and there is much to be done even on very simple levels. In the big cities, among well-educated people, everyone knows the name of

Jesus Christ and they know a little about Christianity, but in many country regions people have never even heard of Jesus Christ.

Still, there are many Chinese people interested in Christianity, and you can see the result of that. After the Cultural Revolution, Protestant and Catholic churches grew very quickly. For example, in Harbin the number of Catholics doubled and the Protestants tripled, but for the Orthodox it actually decreased because of the lack of clergy.

Orthodoxy is a new idea and a new solution for the problems of Christianity in China, but, of course, one must be sensitive. I would never say to other Chinese Christians, "You are a heretic, you are not truly Christian," Never. I only think that Orthodoxy may be a solution for those who are searching for a meaning in life, or who, like me, have become interested in the history of the early church, and for Protestants especially, who find that there is something they have lost along the way.

CHINESE CATHOLICISM

IOANNIS: I'm very sorry for the confusion in the Chinese Catholic Church now. I loved the Catholic Church and learned much there that I am very grateful for. Over the past fifty years, the Roman Catholics were horribly oppressed. Many people who would not join the autonomous Chinese Catholic Church set up by the government were killed for their loyalty to the pope. Now, people are confused because they see the Vatican trying to rebuild the relationship between Rome and the Chinese government, and the Vatican seems to be willing to give in on principles that before they held very strictly.

For example, fifty years ago, Pope Pius XII was absolutely against communism and he decreed that Chinese Catholic Christians could not send their children to public schools, they could not read the newspapers or listen to the radio, they couldn't take a job in the government, and people were killed for obeying this. But now the Vatican is saying, "We have to find a way to forgive each other, to rebuild the relationship," and people are wondering what the sacrifice was for.

The other great Catholic problem, as I mentioned earlier, is liturgical reform, which only reached us a decade ago and has caused great confusion in China. In Chinese seminaries now, professors invited from abroad often teach a soulless modern theology. I was in seminary and I know firsthand

who is forming these Catholic priests. When they go to work in parishes, they often end up undermining the faith. Many times I have seen young priests laugh at local piety to the Virgin Mary, at things like this — but this piety to the Virgin Mary is fundamental to the local churches.

So now, many Catholics are asking themselves, “We have suffered so much for our faith, and now we have to ask what exactly ecclesiastical authority means if they are sending priests who are laughing at our beliefs, who are making changes that we don’t understand? The Vatican now faces a more serious challenge in China than during the Cultural Revolution. Then, people had a simple, fervent loyalty to the Vatican; they died for the pope and for Catholicism. Now, they are challenged by the Catholic Church itself.

PROTESTANT CONVERSIONS

RTE: How are the Protestant churches doing?

IOANNIS: Many contemporary Chinese people are not only converting to Protestantism because they believe in their creeds and spirituality, but also for reasons I cannot agree with. During the Cultural Revolution, almost everyone came to believe in communism so deeply that this belief led them in their daily lives. They were wrong but they had a principle, a faith, and now they have lost it. Many young people tend to worship everything western.

RTE: I imagine they are greatly influenced by the media and internet.

IOANNIS: Yes, and I use the word “worship” on purpose. Protestants were quick to see this, and many foreign missionaries have come to China to work clandestinely through the Chinese Protestant churches. People are converted by foreign pastors because they are so enamored of the West. In Shanghai alone, there are thirty or forty foreign clergymen from England, from America. They are not mainstream Protestants; they are pentecostal and evangelical, or even from sects that don’t hold basic Christian doctrine. Officially they say, “We are businessmen, we are students,” but actually they are doing mission work. (A few, like some Mormons, do run businesses as well.)

For example, they will invite young students to a McDonald’s or a Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant to eat, which is hard for students to afford, and then offer to teach them English. The content of their English teaching, however,

will be their church’s doctrine, and the level of instruction is usually very low. They also offer “business training,” and say, “When you finish school we can help you get to America,” but the goal, of course, is to have these students join their church and then send them back to convert more people.

It is as if, during the time of the apostles, I was a wealthy Roman nobleman who came to Galilee saying, “I’m here to teach you about the Roman gods and about our culture, which is higher and more prosperous than yours. If you follow me, we’ll teach you Latin so you can get a better job, and I’ll take you to our restaurant in Jerusalem to taste our Roman pork.”

I cannot say they are doing something evil, but this is not the Christian way, it is not the apostolic spirit. We need to remember how the holy apostles taught. Materially, they had nothing, no political power, no money; nor did they represent the dominant world culture; their society had been conquered by pagan Rome. The apostles were not even part of the main branch of the Hebrews, but were a small community of Galileans who were often called heretics by the Pharisees. All they had to give was Jesus Christ.

RTE: And that was enough.

IOANNIS: Yes, and if I become a missionary priest I hope that people will be able to feel a genuine apostolic spirit from me. Again, I am not judging these Protestants, or saying that what they are doing is evil. I’m only saying that it is very difficult to find the image of the holy apostles in this.

RTE: I think that many western Protestants would agree with you.

THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM

IOANNIS: It’s good that many people in China have heard of the Lord Jesus Christ already, but I am sorry that not many people have heard of Orthodox Christianity. Orthodoxy and Jesus Christ are not two separate things. Jesus Christ is Orthodoxy. The word of God, the scripture, is Orthodoxy. I feel that even if someone belongs to a heterodox community, if he deeply believes in Jesus Christ, this belief will bring him to Orthodoxy.

The situation in China for Orthodoxy is hopeful: if we light a piece of charcoal and then fan it, a fire will be kindled. Chinese society is now like a piece of unlit charcoal, dark and cold, but with the spark of Orthodoxy and a little fanning, the fire will burn.

RTE: How do you keep your own faith alive?

IOANNIS: The sacraments, of course, and my own prayer life. Also, I often remember a story about a small child who asked a priest, “Father, you are a missionary to a non-Christian country. Perhaps you can convert one hundred people in a year but there are so many people here that even if you work your whole life, you will only be able to convert a small number of them. Your work will never be a success and when you are old you will feel disappointed.” The priest said, “No, I am like a child who walks on the beach. I see fish lying on the sand and I take them and throw them back into the ocean. There are many fish on the beach, and the beach is so long that I just keep walking and save as many as I can. In the ocean, there are billions of fish. If I save one fish it is nothing to the ocean, but to this one fish it is everything. If I save one person, in worldly terms it is nothing, but to this person, I give the whole heavenly kingdom.” ✚