

The Church of the East Establishes Its Independence

Prior to Emperor Zeno's closing of the Edessa "Nestorian" work in 488, a very significant event in the history of the Church of the East took place in Beth Lapat, near the ancient Ur of the Chaldees. An important theological event had just occurred in the West. Zeno had addressed his famous *Henoticon* (instrument of union) to the patriarchs of Constantinople, Alexandria and Antioch, and all three had adopted his formulation of the heretical monophysite christology. In 484 the Church of the East called a synod to meet in Beth Lapat to adopt what Rome called a "Nestorian" confession, in response to the Increasing monophysite takeover. They did not oppose the Chalcedonian formula of 451, but resented that Council's confirmation of the repudiation of Nestorius. Within the churches east of Antioch, by then, there were three distinct parties centering around each's particular christology, and each had its scholarly defenders. 1) There were the followers of Cyril of Alexandria's doctrine that Christ had two natures, one divine and one human, in one person.¹³ (Most of the monks of his see, however, held that the human nature was divinized by the logos and therefore, to all intents and purposes, did not exist after the hypostatic union.) 2) The Church of the East was most amenable to Nestorius's doctrine that Christ had two natures and two *kenume* (the set of personal characteristics of each nature) in one person. 3) The followers of the doctrine of Eutyches of Alexandria, however, held a view that was gaining increasing support in the east, the monophysite heresy that Christ had only a divine nature in His person after the ascension, the human nature having been divinized.

By the time of the Beth Lapat synod, the churches of Edessa and Upper Mesopotamia had been captured by the monophysite heresy. To make a sharp break with this error of the upper Mesopotamian churches, which were still considered a part of the western church, and to escape further controversy over the christological formulation, the synod decided to separate the Eastern church not only from the Western church's ecclesiastical jurisdiction (as in 424) but from its doctrinal confession as well, particularly with regard to its adoption of the Alexandrian monophysite heresy. Thereafter they considered themselves to be a different church, the Church of the East. The crack had widened into a complete break.

From then on not only in practice but in fact there were two independent Christian churches in the world, each with its own government and doctrinal position. It was not that the Roman Church and the Byzantine Church held the same christology, for Rome was duophysite and the Byzantine eastern churches had become monophysite. But they were still one church, the Western, Roman Church. The Church of the East too was duophysite, with a slightly different way of expressing it, but definitely not holding the view condemned at Ephesus as "Nestorian" (making Christ appear to be two persons), as we shall see later. But the Church of the East no longer considered itself a part of the Roman Church, and the Roman church retaliated by labeling it "Nestorian" after the deposed "heretic," Nestorius.¹⁴ In 499 another synod of the Church of the East rejected the doctrine of the celibacy of the clergy (though a later act required the highest clergy to be celibate, a rule sometimes ignored in different times and places). This rejection of the highly honored Roman rule made the Church of the East even more disdained by the Roman clergy.

These Eastern or "Nestorian" Christians were versatile and diligent propagators of their faith. With the flight of the Edessa theological school to Nisibis, outside the farthest borders of the Roman Empire, and the opening of another in Djondishpur, with a hospital also in the latter city, many Syrian Christians began to move eastward into Persia and to revive the spirits of that harassed Church. Zernov writes that "The Nestorians were renowned doctors. Some of them exercised considerable political influence, being confidants and advisers of such Califs as Harum al Rashid (785-809) and his successors. The third center of Christian scholarship was Merv, where many translations were made from Greek and Syriac into languages spoken in Samarkand and Bokhara."¹⁵

The influence these centers of learning had on the Arabs was also very great. Schaff, in a very interesting footnote, states his wonder that the "Nestorians" should have had such an important influence on the geographical extension of knowledge, even on the Arabs before they reached the learned Alexandria. They received their first knowledge of Greek literature through the Syrians, he wrote, and learned of medicine through the Greek physicians and those of the "Nestorians" at Edessa. Then he adds, "Feeble as the science of the Nestorian priests may have been, it could still, with its peculiar and pharmaceutical turn, act genially upon a race (the Arabs) which had long lived in free converse with nature, and had preserved a more fresh sensibility to every sort of study of nature, than the people of Greek and Italian studies The Arabians, we repeat, are to be regarded as the proper founders of the physical *sciences*, in the sense we are now accustomed to attach to the word."¹⁶

The "Nestorians" were firm believers in Christian education. Every bishop endeavored to maintain a school in connection with his church, realizing the necessity of such education in a land where all government education was pagan. "The chorepiscopus of every diocese," wrote Wigram, "appears to have had education as his special charge." Then he went on to write:

Scribes and doctors were highly honored. The school (of Nisibis) formed a self-governing corporation, which could own property, and was extradiocesan, its head being apparently subordinate only to the patriarch. It was quartered in a monastery, the tutors being brethren of the same.... Education was free, but students were expected to maintain themselves.... Begging was forbidden; but students might lend money to one another at one percent, and the steward had a number of bursaries in his gift. The course was purely theological, the sole textbooks being the Scriptures, and more particularly the Psalms.... The Church services also formed a part of the regular course; and no doubt all the approved theological works of the Church were to be found in the library. The students lived in groups of five or six in a cell, where they ate in common.... The college in Sabr-Ishu's day contained eight hundred pupils.¹⁷

During the year preceding the Mohammedan conquest Babai was the leader of the church in Persia, though there was no patriarch at the time as the king wanted a "Jacobite," a monophysite. Babai was an aggressive spiritual leader, and under him schools in sixty places were restored or built. Many books were translated or written to supply these schools, and missionaries and traveling evangelists were sent to many places. The statement has been made that more than 2,000 books and epistles or letters, written by prominent leaders of the time, were circulating among the Christians.¹⁸

By the year 424, as the missionaries planted churches northwards, Merv, Nishapur and Herat, south of the Oxus River, all had bishops while their monks taught the converts how to read and improve their vegetable growing.¹⁹ In a day when there was little understanding of the importance of fresh fruit or vegetables to maintain health, the "Nestorian" physicians with this knowledge brought healing to many with the medicinal use of a "sherbet" of fruit juices and with the use of rhubarb, making both famous throughout the Orient. In 503 a bishop's seat was established in Samarkand. The missionaries kept moving northward, with perhaps their greatest success being the great Kerait conversions of the eighth century, with 400,000 families converted. The Onguts and Uigurs also were largely converted. Their historian Malech has reported:

During the patriarchate of Mar Ishu Jahb II, 636, Syrian missionaries went to China, and for 150 years this mission was active.... 109 Syrian missionaries have worked in China during 150 years of the Chinese mission.... They went out from Beth Nahrin, the birthplace of Abraham, the father of all believers. The missionaries traveled on foot; they had sandals on their feet, and a staff in their hands, and carried a basket on their backs, and in the basket was the Holy Writ and the cross. They took the road around the Persian Gulf; went over deep rivers and high mountains, thousands of miles. On their way they met many heathen nations and preached to them the gospel of Christ.²⁰

During the early years of the Mohammedan regime, the Syrian Christian churches had more freedom and peace than under the Persian kings. A concordat was signed with Mohammed whereby the Christians would pay tribute, in time of war shelter endangered Muslims and refrain from helping the enemy. In exchange they were to be given religious toleration, though they were not to proselytize, and they would not be required to fight for Mohammed.²¹ He had reason to befriend the Christians for a "Nestorian" had been Mohammed's teacher at one point and, in some early battles, certain Christian communities had actually fought on his side against pagan tribes.²² So much Christian influence, though highly distorted, is apparent in his teaching that Islam has been called a Christian heresy.

By the end of the eighth century the Church of the East had expanded to great distances with at least 25 metropolitans and one hundred and 50 bishops. Six bishops were the minimum to support a metropolitan. They were all under the patriarch of Bagdad, who had moved from Ctesiphon-Selucia in 763 to the newer city a few miles up the Tigris. So vast was this patriarchate that metropolitans in the outer regions were not required to attend regular synods and had to report in writing only every six years.²³ Zernov describes as one of the patriarch's activities that "He sent out missionaries to Tibet and to various nomadic tribes and consecrated bishops for them who moved with their flocks over the vast open spaces of central Asia."²⁴

The location of some of these 25 metropolitans is pointed out by Stewart, who cites the *Synodicon Orientale*, translated by J. B. Chabot. There the metropolitan of the Turks is placed tenth in the list and is followed by those of Razikaye, Herat, Armenia, China, Java, India and Samarkand. He also cites information, concerning the spread of the gospel in this period to the Turko-Tatar tribes, from a new manuscript translated by Mingana. This material is in the form of a letter from a Mar Philoxenus, of the eighth century, to the governor of Hirta, and makes frequent reference to Christian Turks throughout the area south of Lake Baikal. Mingana gives evidence to support his belief that the manuscript really has two parts, the latter written sometime between 730 and 790. It is this section that speaks of the many Christian Turks in central and eastern Asia. The writer states they were divided into strong clans, living nomadic lives with tents, though very wealthy, and that they ate meat, drank milk, had clean habits and orthodox beliefs. They used a Syriac version of the Bible but in their worship services translated into the Turkish language so that the people could understand the gospel.²⁵

The manuscript also mentions that these Turko-Tartars had four great Christian kings who lived at some distance from each other. Their names are given as Gawirk, Girk, Tasahz and Langu. Mingana believes that they were the heads, or Khakans, of the four tribal confederacies of the Keraites, Uigurs, Naimans and Merkites. The populace of each king is said to have been over 400,000 families. If there were five persons to a family, this would mean two million per king for a grand total of eight million.²⁶ If only half that many represented the actual population, it would still represent a Christian community so great it would be a tremendous witness to the zeal of those early missionaries.

Mingana declares that the credit for carrying the gospel of Christ to these tribes of central and eastern Asia belongs entirely to

the untiring zeal and the marvelous spiritual activities of the Nestorian church, the most missionary church that the world has ever seen. We cannot but marvel at the love of God, of man, and of duty which animated those unassuming disciples of Christ ... (who) literally explored all the corners of the eastern globe "to sow in them the seed of true religion as it was known to them."²⁷

A final witness to the great extent of "Nestorian" Christianity by the beginning of the ninth century can be taken from Gibbon. Of their church he said, "their numbers, with those of the Jacobites, were computed to surpass the Greek and Latin communions."²⁸

The Christian Mission to T'ang China

During those early centuries of the Christian era, as the missionaries of the Church of the East were working their way eastward, the great Chinese Empire had not been inactive in making western contacts. Hirth, in his compilation of all the references to the Western nations in the Chinese historical annals begins with a quotation from 91 B.C.

When the first embassy was sent from China to An-Shi (Parthia), the king of An-Shi ordered 20,000 cavalry to meet them on the eastern frontier.... After the Chinese embassy had returned they sent forth an embassy to follow the Chinese embassy to come and see the extent and greatness of the Chinese Empire. They offered to the Chinese court large birds' eggs, and jugglers from Li-kan.²⁹

Another quotation, of 120 A.D., speaks of another embassy going to Ch'ang-An, the capital of China, and offering "musicians and jugglers They said of themselves: 'We are men from the west of the sea; the west of the sea is the same as Ta-ts'in'," ³⁰ (the sea being the Gulf of Persia). From then on the designation Li-kan is seldom used, and Ta-ts'in, with a later spelling of Ta-Ch'in, becomes the usual designation. Since the early Christians in China, as the famous Monument inscription of 781 indicates, were called Ta-Ch'in Chiao, Ta Ch'in Religion, as we shall see shortly, it is important to determine where Ta-Ch'in was. One of the early Chinese records is worth quoting at some length:

The country of Ta-ts'in is called Li-chien (Li-kin) and, as being situated on the eastern port of the sea, its territory amounts to several thousand li. . . Their kings always desired to send embassies to China, but the An-Shi (Parthians) wished to carry on trade with them in Chinese silks, and it is for this reason that they were cut off from communication. This lasted till ... (166 A.D.) when the king of Ta-ts'in, An-tun, sent an embassy who, from the frontier of Jih-nan (Annam) offered ivory, rhinoceros horns, and tortoise. From that time dates the direct intercourse with this country.³¹

The country of Fu-lin, also called Ta-ts'in, lies above the western sea. In the southeast it borders on Po-ssu (Persia).... The emperor Yang-ti of the Sui dynasty (A.D. 605-617) always wished to open intercourse with Fu-lin, but did not succeed. In ... (643) the king of Fu-lin, Po-to-li, sent an embassy. [Then mention of embassies in 667, 701, and 719 are followed by this statement.] A few months after, he further sent *ta-to-sheng* [great-virtuous-priests, a term like Reverend, doubtless for Nestorians who arrived then] to our court with tribute.³²

Saeki identifies An-tun with the Roman emperor Marcus Antonius.³³ Hirth states, "We may say, in a few words, Ta-ts'in was Syria as a Roman province; Fu-lin was Syria as an Arab province during the T'ang dynasty (618-907), and as a Seldjuk province during the Sung dynasty (960-1280)."³⁴ Saeki believes that the etymological derivation of Fu-lin is from E-fu-lin for Ephraim, between Jerusalem and Samaria.³⁵ This opinion is corroborated by the reference in the first Chinese Christian document of 638, "The Jesus Messiah Discourse," of which we will take note later, in which we read, "Just about that time, the One (Jesus Messiah) was born in the city of Jerusalem in the country of Fu-lin (Ephraim)."³⁶ Hirth also states it is his view "that all the first embassies sent from Fu-lin during the T'ang dynasty were carried out by Nestorian missionaries. The Nestorians enjoyed a great reputation in Western Asia on account of their medical skill."³⁷

The Chinese records give a graphic picture of the long trade routes across their country, around the south of the Gobi desert, to the Oxus River, into Parthia and on to Mesopotamia. An alternate route was by sea from Canton, around the Malay peninsula, past the southern tip of India and into the Persian Gulf. Yule writes, "At this time, (early fifth century) the Euphrates was navigable as high as Hira, a city lying southwest of ancient Babylon ... and the ships of India and China were constantly to be seen moored before the houses of the town."³⁸ The Chinese either turned their goods, chiefly silks, over to the Arabs here, or over to the Parthians at the Oxus River, the latter then bringing them to Hira. There they were transshipped around the Arabian peninsula, up the Red Sea to Solomon's Ezion-geber or the Aelana (modern Akabah) of the Romans; from there caravans carried them to Petra, the great market city, to sell them to the western traders. Of Petra Hirth writes:

During the first two centuries A D., Petra or Rekem, was the great emporium of Indian (and, we may add, Chinese) commodities, where merchants from all parts of the world met for the purpose of traffic.... Under the auspices of Rome, Petra rose, along with her dependencies, to an incredible opulence.... This prosperity was entirely dependent upon the caravan trade, which at this entrepot changed carriage, and passed from the hands of the southern to those of the northern merchants.³⁹

It was not until the seventh century that two events brought about the demise of this great trading center. The first was the smuggling of silkmoth eggs into Syria, concealed in a bamboo cane, the presumption being that it was done by "Nestorians,"⁴⁰ with the result that "by the end of the sixth century (Syria) appears to have been meeting the west's demand for the raw material."⁴¹ The other was the fall of Petra to the Mohammedans after 640. It was without doubt through these early oriental traders that the Syrian Christians of "Ta-Ch'in" first heard of the greatness of the Chinese Empire and determined to take the gospel there. It is even very likely that they arranged to go with returning merchants. We know that the time was early in the T'ang dynasty, when the empire had its widest extent, its soldiers governing 811 the way to the Oxus River, for the Nestorian Monument declares the year of their arrival at the capital of Ch'ang-An (or Hsi-an-fu) to be 635 A.D.

Evidence of Christian Activity in China, 635-845

Of all the evidence of the activity of the Christian missionaries in China which have come to light in the era of modern history, none has been more dramatic than the report of the discovery of the "Nestorian" stone Monument by a Jesuit priest in 1625. It had actually been dug up by Chinese workmen, under an old wall, two years earlier "at a certain place in Kuan-chung"⁴² which Saeki identifies as the site of a "Nestorian" monastery and church near Chouchih, about 30 miles from Hsi-an-fu, the modern name for the old capital, Ch'ang-An. When Trigault, the first Roman Catholic missionary to see it, took rubbings it had been moved to Hsi-an-fu, probably late in 1624. It is still there today, while an exact replica exists in the Vatican museum, with still another in Japan at the Shingon (True Word) Buddhist Temple on Koyasan. When announcements of it were first made in Europe some doubted its authenticity, claiming it was a "pious fraud" of the Jesuits to show the antiquity of their Church's missionary efforts.⁴³ Of this Gibbon has written:

*The Christianity of China, between the seventh and the thirteenth century, is invincibly proved by the consent of Chinese, Arabian, Syriac, and Latin evidence. The inscription of Hsianfu, which describes the fortunes of the Nestorian church, from the first mission, A.D. 636, to the current year 781, is accused of forgery by La Croze, Voltaire, and others, who become the dupes of their own cunning, while they are afraid of a Jesuitical fraud.*⁴⁴ One of the criticisms of it was that the style of writing "is too modern to be credited with a thousand year's age."⁴⁵ Of this Hirth says it "is utterly baseless A Chinese *connoisseur*, who had never heard of the Nestorian Tablet, and to whom I showed a tracing of it, declared it at once as 'T'ang-pi,' i.e., written in the style of, and containing the slight varieties adopted during, the T'ang dynasty."⁴⁶

The stone itself stands over nine feet high, three feet wide, and one foot thick, with two dragons carved over the top edge, a small "Nestorian" cross near the top center, and nine large Chinese characters below it reading, "A Monument Commemorating the Propagation of the Ta-Ch'in Luminous Religion in the Middle Kingdom (China)." It is stated to have been composed by a Persian presbyter named Adam and erected on "the 7th of the First Month of 781 A.D." by one "Lord Yazedbouzid" chorepiscopus of Hsi-an. Adam's Chinese name is given as Ching-ching, and in Syriac, Saeki says, it is stated on the stone, "Chorepiscopus, and Papash of Chinestan."⁴⁷ The names of some 70 missionaries are given in Chinese and Syriac at the end of the 2000-word inscription.

The inscription describes how the missionaries arrived in 635, were welcomed by the emperor, and instructed to put some of their writings into Chinese. (A later document, "The Book of Praise," indicates that there were then 530 Christian manuscripts at hand.)⁴⁸ They were given permission by proclamation in 638 to stay and teach, and a monastery was built for them outside the city in the I-ning ward. The names of the T'ang emperors are mentioned and praised as benefactors, some sending their portraits to be hung in the monastery and providing generous patronage. In return, the priests prayed for them and their ancestors daily. The arrival of 17 reinforcements from TaCh'in in 744 is mentioned which is in harmony with a Syrian church record of the departure then of these 17 missionaries.⁴⁹ Comment on the doctrinal portion of the inscription will be made later.

The "Nestorian" Monument Narrative

With the third chronological period from which we have a Christian writing we come to the famous stone Monument of 781; to its discovery and historical elements we have already alluded. For a brief description of the contents as a whole the following summary of Legge is good:

The contents are threefold: Doctrinal, Historical, Eulogistic. The first part gives a brief outline of the teachings of the Religion, and the Ways and Practices of its Ministers; the second part tells us of its first entrance into China, and the patronage extended to it for the most part for nearly 150 years by various emperors; in the third part to which, though it be the shortest, the two others are introductory, the Christians express in verse their praise of God and their Religion, and also of the Emperors whose protection and favours they had enjoyed.²²³

The earliest group of documents seems to include four coming from a period between 635 and 641, the period when, according to the Monument, the first Nestorian missionaries, led by Alopen, or Abraham, reached the capital of Chang-An, later called Hsi-an. In what is probably the latest of these four, and longest, "The Lord of the Universe's Discourse on Alms-Giving," appears the following statement: "Though it is only 641 years since the time of the birth of the Messiah, consisting of 'the five attributes,' yet (His name) is known in all parts of the world."²¹³ The significance of the reference to "the five attributes" will be considered later, but here we note a date that pinpoints the time of writing of this document. This date fits in with the time given on the Nestorian Monument for the arrival of Alopen's party, and the translation work done by them, as described there in the following statement:

In the ninth year of the period Chaang-kwan (A.D. 635), he [Alopen] arrived at Chaang-an. The emperor sent his minister, duke Fang Hsuanling, bearing the staff of office, to the western suburb, there to receive the visitor and to conduct him to the palace. The Scriptures [Christian literature] were translated in the Library. (His Majesty) questioned him about his system in his own forbidden apartments, became deeply convinced of its correctness and truth, and gave him special orders for its propagation. In the twelfth Chang-kwan year (638), in autumn, in the seventh month, the following proclamation was issued ... let it have free course throughout the empire.²¹⁴

The imperial record of Chinese dynasties and rulers has been kept with great precision so these dates of 635 to 638 can be assumed to be accurate, testifying as they do of Alpen's arrival and translation work, before 641.

The other three manuscripts of this group seem to be linked together by notations at the end and are doubtless the ones written prior to 641, that is, between 635 and 638. The first of the three is "The Jesus-Messiah Discourse," the second-longest of the four; it is obviously intended as an effort to present the essentials of the Christian religion to the imperial court. Starting with the necessity for revelation to know God, it proceeds through a summary of the Ten Commandments, the virgin birth, life, and sacrificial death of Christ, with the last part of the manuscript missing. The astonishing feature is the extent to which the writer relied on Buddhist expressions, perhaps another indication of the early nature of this manuscript, revealing the new missionary's lack of knowledge of the language and complete dependence on a Buddhist translator. At one point "the Buddhas" are spoken of as seeing God in Heaven, while the Chinese ideographs chosen to give the phonetic sound to the foreign names are often rude ones whereas, with real effort, noble ones could have been found, and did appear in later manuscripts.

The next document which seems to fit in with this group has no title, but at the end is written "The Parable, Part II." Saeki has given it the title "A Discourse on Monotheism" which appears to be what it is. The third, almost as long as the first, is called "The

Discourse on the Oneness of the Ruler of the Universe, Part I," and like the others has much Buddhist phraseology. The fourth, with the '641 date, covers the material in the Sermon on the Mount and the highlights of the Gospels, and shows a much improved understanding of the meaning of the characters chosen for phonetic sounds. All four of these manuscripts, which are associated with the arrival of the first Christian missionaries, were obtained in China by two Japanese scholars in 1916 and 1922²¹⁵ and are now in Kyoto, Japan.

A Japanese scholar, Dr. Takakusa, while studying "The Catalogue (of the books of) teaching of Chakya (Buddha) in the period of Chanyuan" (785-804 A.D.), discovered a passage referring to the Christian presence in Hsian, and particularly to that of Adam Ching-ching. The passage referred to Prajna, the Indian Buddhist scholar who came to China in 782. It stated: "*He translated together with Ching-ching, Adam, a Persian priest of the monastery of Ta-Ch'in, the Satparamita sutra from a Hu (Uigur) text, and finished translating seven volumes.*"⁵⁰ The Catalogue writer went on to complain that Prajna knew neither Uigur nor Chinese and that Ching-ching knew no Sanskrit nor understood Buddhism, but both were seeking vainglory. He further mentioned that "They presented a memorial (to the Emperor) expecting to get it propagated" but that the Emperor (Tetsung, 780-804) was wise and after examining their work determined that it was poorly done, "*the principles being obscure and the wording vague. The emperor then declared that the Ta-Ch'in religion and Buddhism were entirely opposed to each other; Ching-ching handed down the teaching of Mi-shih-ho (Messiah, using the same three Chinese characters as were used on the Nestorian Stone) while (Prajna) propagated the sutras of the Buddha. It is wished that the boundaries of the doctrine may be kept distinct.*"⁵¹ With that the emperor forbade the two from working together further.

Striking evidence of these early Christian times is presented by the remains of the monastery built at Chou-chih where the Monument was found. The building has long since crumbled away, but eleventh century Chinese poets have mentioned it in their poems by the name of Ta-Ch'in Ssu (temple), and in 1933 a famous tower on the property was still standing while the people of the area still called the place Ta-Ch'in Ssu.⁵³ Further, tombstones with "Nestorian" crosses on them, in areas where the local records indicate they date from the Tang era of the eighth and ninth centuries, have been found in different places in China.⁵⁴

Farther west, in the area of the salt sea in Turkestan called Lake Issyk-kul, over 600 tombstones with crosses on them were found in two ancient cemeteries. The oldest date was 858 and the latest 1342. The inscriptions on many were in the Syriac script but the names indicate that these people were native converts. One inscription reads, "*This is the grave of Pasak--The aim of life is Jesus, our Redeemer.*" Another states, "*This is the tomb of Shelicha, the famous Exegete and Preacher who enlightened all the cloisters with Light, being the son of Exegete Peter. He was famous for his wisdom, and when preaching his voice sounded like a trumpet.*"⁵⁵ Among the names are those of "*nine archdeacons, eight doctors of ecclesiastical jurisprudence and of biblical interpretation, 22 visitors, three commentators, 46 scholastics, two preachers and an imposing number of priests.*"⁵⁶ A chorepiscopus is also buried there with mention that he came from a nearby city. This last resting place of the saints of 700 years ago is mute witness of a past genuine Christian presence. As Stewart says of it, "*Only in the grave stones from Semiryechensk (its Russian name) do we find evidence of the rich and varied Christian life which prevailed in one tiny corner of these extensive areas, filled as they once were with Christian communities.*"⁵⁷

The Tun-huang cave of western China, sealed, as mentioned earlier, in 1036 and not opened until about 1900, contained over 2,000 manuscripts, including some Christian ones. Also it had a painting on its walls of a Christian bishop on horseback, carrying a bishop's rod with a "Nestorian" cross on the end. In addition there was in the cave a silk screen painting of a robed man wearing a crown with a gold cross, with two other crosses around his neck, holding a bishop's rod. This painting was acquired by the Sir Aurel Stein expedition in 1908, and is now in the British Museum in London.⁵⁸ It seems to be beyond doubt a painting of an Oriental Christian bishop of the pre-1000 A.D. era. (See back cover painting.) One of the intriguing aspects of the painting is that the right hand is held up with the thumb touching the tip of the second finger. The "Nestorians" were well known for their fondness for symbols. Was this posture a double witness to the Trinity with its triangle of thumb and finger and the remaining three fingers pointing upwards? Buddha images and paintings of earlier centuries usually show him with hands clasped in his lap or an upraised hand with open palm. In later centuries, however, it is not uncommon to see Buddha figures with the right hand raised in the posture of this painting of a Christian bishop. The question as to who used this symbol first is not answered, but it does seem to have more significance as a Christian Witness.

In addition, numerous references to the Persian missionaries in the land appear in the Imperial historical annals of China. For instance, the full proclamation of permission, issued in 638 and referred to on the Monument, appears with "*the Persian monk A-to-pen (Abraham) bringing scriptures and teaching from far*" specifically mentioned.⁶¹ Again, "*In the ninth month of the twentieth year K'ai-yuan (October 732) the king of Persia sent the chief Pan-na-mi (Barnubi) with the monk of great virtue, Chi-lieh (Cyriacus) as ambassadors with tribute.*"⁶² But these casual references are too numerous to mention further. The evidence of the presence of the "Nestorian" missionaries in China during the T'ang era is incontestable. On the basis of the Chinese records alone Hirth states dogmatically, "*all the first embassies sent from Fu-tin during the T'ang dynasty were carried out by Nestorian missionaries.*"⁶³

Decline of the Christians in China from 845

In the year 845, a great disaster befell the Christian cause. An act of proscription was promulgated by the emperor. The Christians were not the prime targets but were definitely included. The act was directed against the many Buddhist monasteries and temples by the emperor, "*hating the monks and nuns because (like moths) they ate up the Empire. He decided to have done with them,*" as one report puts it.⁷⁰ The act is referred to in the Chinese historical records with specific reference to the Ta-Ch'in religion, Christianity. When Wu Tsung was on the throne he destroyed Buddhism. Throughout the Empire he demolished 4,600 monasteries, 40,000 Refugees, settled as secular subjects 265,000 monks and nuns, and 150,000 male and female serfs, while of land (he resumed) some

tens of millions of ch'ing. Of the Ta-Ch'in (Syrian Christian) and Mu-hu Hsien (Zoroastrian) monasteries there were over two thousand people.⁷¹ A further report states: The rest of the monks and nuns, along with the monks of Ta-Ch'in ... all were compelled to return to the world. A period was fixed for the demolition of those monasteries which were not to be allowed to remain. (A few were to be designated objects of art.) Materials from the demolished monasteries were to be used for repairing yamens and post-stages. Bronze images, mirrors, and clappers were to be melted down for coinage.⁷² Although this act was withdrawn two years later, the damage was done. Buddhism never recovered from the blow, which may account for the fact that it never became the dominant force in China that it became in Japan.⁷³ Further, the Christian work definitely went into eclipse. The troublous times which followed the disintegration of the Tang dynasty, with the sacking of cities and slaughter of the inhabitants, as occurred in Canton where many foreigners died,⁷⁴ must have been also a contributing factor to the eclipse of Christian churches begun over 200 years earlier.

Foster gives the report of an Arabic record, written in Baghdad about 987, which tells of the writer meeting with a Christian monk who had seven years earlier been sent to China by the patriarch, with five others, "to bring the affairs of Christianity in that country to order." This young man told the Arab writing the account, "that Christianity had become quite extinct in China. The Christians had perished in various ways. Their Church had been destroyed."⁷⁵ The Christian monk had then returned to Baghdad. Whether this delegation had really made an adequate tour is problematical. Saeki has given evidence to show that the monasteries and churches in Chouchin and Hsi-an continued in existence long after this time. Also in 1093 the patriarch Sabrishah III appointed a bishop George to Cathy.⁷⁶ Nevertheless the evidence is that the progress of the Christian churches in China went through a noticeable decline during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Saeki reports that the famous Taoist scholar, Chia Shang-hsiang, who compiled the life of Lao-tze about 1100 A.D., apparently was unaware that the Christians had ever been present, for he classified "the remnants of the Chinese Nestorians among the 98 kinds of heretical cults or religions then known to the Taoists. He named it 'The Messiah Heretics' and put it in the 49th of the 98 heretical cults or religions prevailing in the 81 countries around Liu-sha and its neighborhood."⁷⁷

A remarkable example of the influence of Christianity on pagan religion can be seen in various concepts and rituals of the "Nestorians" being adopted, in a distorted form, by Buddhists, thereby radically affecting their tradition,⁷⁸ as witnessed by the development of the Lama sect in Tibet. Buddhism reached Tibet in 640, sometime before Christian missionaries did, but by the end of the first millennium, as striking resemblances show, Tibetan Buddhism had incorporated the Far Eastern "Nestorian" clergy's increasing preoccupation with demons, holy water, prayers for the dead, confession and red vestments as well as their traditional monastic system and hierarchy topped with a patriarch-in-Lamaism's the Delai (All Embracing) Lama.

Although indications seem to warrant the conclusion that the curtain had fallen, finally, at the end of the tenth century, on the drama of Christianity in China, a story which opened so auspiciously at the beginning of the seventh, it was not to be so.

B/O

Naming God in China

The "Nestorian" Monument refers to the Trinity in its opening paragraph and to one of the Persons as well. The statement reads, "Is this not the mysterious Person (shen) of our Three-in-One (san i miao shen) 三一妙身 the true Lord without beginning, A-lo-ha?"²⁶⁵ It is susceptible of other renderings so needs to be examined more carefully. The problem lies in how to understand the word *shen* in relation to the Trinity. Does it mean "Person" as one of the members of the Trinity, as suggested above, or does it refer to the being of the trinity as Legge translates it, "our Eloah, with His marvellous being, Three-in-One, the unoriginated True Lord?"²⁶⁹ Since the word *shen* in relation to God appears twice more in the Monument and once in one of the other documents, it is necessary to look at these. The fourth paragraph of the Monument begins, as Moule, I believe, correctly renders it, "Upon this the divided Person of our Three-in-One (san i fen shen) 三一分身, the brilliant and reverend Mishihe [Messiah], veiling and hiding His true majesty, came to earth in the likeness of man."²⁷⁰ The next reference is in the opening of the poem at the end. "The divided Person (shen) appeared on earth, redeeming and saving without bound. Let us reverentially adore Aloha who is the Almighty Father and the Mysterious Person; and Messiah who is the Almighty Son and the Incarnate Person; and the Holy Spirit [in phoneticized Syriac] who is the Witnessing Person; these above Three Persons are united together in One substance, (san shen -- i t'i).²⁷² The literal meaning of *shen*, according to Wilder and Ingram, is "the body, the trunk: one's self; personal; the whole life."²⁷³ In the same paragraph of the Monument containing the second reference to the Trinity, there is another mention of the Trinity without the use of *fen* or *shen*, but with a reference to the Holy Spirit. Legge translates it, "He [Messiah] appointed His new doctrines, operating without words, by the cleansing influence of the Triune [Three-in-One] [san i ching feng] 三一淨風."...at the end of this paragraph, in the passage previously discussed as probably referring to baptism, where we read *sui feng* (水風) Legge translated "water and the spirit"²⁸² The three passages would thus read as follows, taken in the actual word order of the Chinese characters: *Our Three-in-One's Mysterious Person, Originating True Lord, Aloha. Our Three-in-One's Divided Person, Illustrious, Noble Messiah ... He appointed the Three-in-One's Holy Spirit, Silent (Wordless) Operator of the New Teaching, Who forms in man the capacity for well-doing through correct faith.*

Ricci affermava che gli antichi avevano professato la fede nel Dio creatore: l'antica concezione di *Shangdi* 上帝 (Sovrano dall'Alto) e *Tian* 天 (Cielo) non è impersonale e immanente, ma personale e trascendente. Di conseguenza Ricci, per nominare Dio, accanto al (così ritenuto) neologismo *Tianzhu* 天主 (Signore del Cielo) impiegò anche i termini *Shangdi* e *Tian*, già utilizzati dalla letteratura classica.

La Vera Origine di Tutte le Cose (萬物真原 **Wanwu Zhenyuan**), pubblicato nel 1628,¹ costituisce il catechismo (nel senso menzionato sopra) di Giulio Aleni, sul modello de *Il Vero Significato del Signore del Cielo* di Matteo Ricci (1603). Si tratta di un' opera apologetica, di introduzione e difesa della filosofia cristiana, in dialogo con in letterati confuciani. Il tema principale, la creazione, non presentava poche difficoltà in quanto la dottrina cristiana della "creatio ex nihilo", era un concetto estraneo alle cosmologie cinesi. Aleni ribadisce la convinzione ricciana che la rivelazione naturale era presente nel confucianesimo originale. In questo trattato, che ebbe un enorme successo e molte ristampe, secondo solo al *catechismo* del Ricci, Aleni impiega molti termini confuciani e neo-confuciani per esprimere il concetto di Dio creatore. Oltre ai termini ormai classici quali Signore del Cielo (**Tianzhu** 天主), Signore dall' Alto (**Shangdi** 上帝) e Cielo (**Tian** 天), Aleni adotta Grande Padre e Madre (**Dafumu** 大父母); Grande Signore (**Dazhu** 大主); Signore (**Zhu** 主); Signore Assoluto (**Zhuzai** 主宰); Signore Grande e Supremo (**Dazhuzai** 大主宰); Supremo Cielo (**Taigaotian** 太高天); Grande Principio (**Dali** 大理). Lo stesso titolo all'opera, *La Vera Origine di Tutte le Cose* (Wanwu Zhenyuan 萬物真原), è un nome di Dio creatore. Quest'ultima frase si trova anche oggi scritta nella facciata o nel presbiterio di molte chiese in Cina.

B/1 Nobody can deny the interaction between the **recent Christianity upsurge among the Chinese intellectuals, who mainly inhabit cities**, and the **surprising increase of the Chinese Christians, most of who live in rural areas**. However, anybody studying the general situation of Christianity in China during the past 20 years would observe that the two developments have been going their own ways from the beginning to the present and with such a minimum relationship to each other that one can hardly find a similar example in history. Indeed, because of many sociological, political and psychological conditions, **Christian missionary work in China seems more difficult or less effective in the cities than in the countryside**. And owing to the unconscious despising of the grassroots and uneducated people, Chinese intellectuals have been very little affected by the rural Christians, though some scholars have begun to take seriously the considerable growth of Christianity in rural areas. Therefore, although the intellectuals' interest in Christianity emerged in the late 1980s a few years later than the increase of peasants' conversion, the former was not the outcome of the latter.

This difference comes from the following fact: **the peasants have long been in such a poor condition** that they have to exert **all their strength and move heaven and earth to earn their living** and they have had no **access to the wider life** beyond their personal reach. At the same time, **the intellectuals** could spare some attention to a larger world than their own living. In addition to that, **the Confucian tradition of "taking the world as one's own task"** has had very deep-rooted influence on the mentality of Chinese intellectuals

There appeared **nearly 2000 articles and 200 books about Christianity from late 1980s to middle 1990s**, in striking contrast to the **only 8 articles and 2 books that appeared from 1949 to 1978!** And while all the publications in the field in those 30 years were full of abuses, hurls and despise of Christianity, the attitude towards Christianity of the authors and editors of this generation as a whole is undergoing a course from negative criticism, through objective description, to sympathetic appraisal. Thus, with the spread of the publications and their influence upon college students and young teachers, the 1990s witnessed a real Christian upsurge among the Chinese intellectuals.

During the years since 1949, the only area where one could access the fragmentary material about Christianity was the scholarly studies in these fields. Only in the study of the history of western philosophy, one could access **some of St. Augustine's writings**. Only in the study of history of political theories, one could access **a bit of Thomas Aquinas**. And only in the study of the history of "foreign literature", could one access **the "Song of Songs" from the Bible!** **The intellectuals** concerned have a much **wider horizon**, more plural perspectives and **more rational ways of thinking** in connection with Christianity than the rural Christians. As their interest in Christianity began with their studies and research in humanist disciplines, they display **strong, in many cases even exclusive, interest in the scholarly factors of Christianity**, such as philosophical theology, the history of mission, apologetics and the inculturization of the doctrines.

The admirers rather than converts make up the majority of the intellectuals concerned, while the converts form a greater part of the upsurge in the countryside. And among the baptized Christian intellectuals, there are relatively more liberals and fewer churchgoers, in comparison with the rural and overseas Chinese Christians.

According to the latest **statistics, by the year 2000** the number of Protestants in China had already reached 20 million, with Catholics reaching 4 million. **After 1979, churches have reopened at the rate of three every two days**, and there are now **more than 12 thousand Protestant churches and 26 thousands so-called meeting points**". As for Catholics, there are 4600 churches. From 1980 to 1998, Chinese churches have printed 20 million copies of the Bible⁴, including various editions in languages of minority nationalities in China.

B/2 The intellectual origins of the **clash between Christianity and traditional Chinese culture** can be grouped under three points.
The first is its **faith in a personal God**

¹ BAV, Borgia Cinese 349 (4).

creation, original sin, and redemption which are absent in Chinese culture and strange to it. The second is **the Christian concept of equality**, as in “all are created equal before God”.

This, too, is absent from or differs in the Confucian tradition, which posits a distinction between close and distant relationships.

The third is **Christian monotheism**

and the great distance between this and the polytheistic worship and symbolic system of Buddhist and Taoist believers.

In addition, **the impact of the challenge to Christian social participation**

Chinese folk religion has a long history and a broad base. For thousands of years, folk religion was an appendage of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, and became entangled with them to form an important constituent of traditional Chinese culture. Along with reform and openness in Chinese society, Chinese folk religion, once seen as superstition, has undergone a rapid recovery, to become the liveliest faith at the grass roots. In rural villages in particular, folk religion of every description is ubiquitous, having nearly become the primary spiritual life of many peasants.

Thus **Christianity and folk religion are in competition**

Temples to every sort of god are being rebuilt, a great number of the masses are enthralled with *fengshui* and various types of fortune telling. On the other hand, folk religion, to a certain extent, has an impact on and even transforms Christianity. The “folk-religionization” of Chinese Christianity is a common phenomenon in rural villages. The present characteristics of rural Chinese Christianity can be summed up as follows: the number of believers is growing rapidly, enthusiasm is high, the faith is pious, the emphasis is on rituals, the quality of faith is low, there is a lack of pastors, preaching is poor, etc.

“**Folk-religionised**” Christianity includes many components of folk religious beliefs and even feudal superstition. For example, God is viewed as a god of direct “cause, effect, and retribution”, and this gives faith in God a pronounced utilitarian character. The Bible is taken as a protective talisman or as a magic weapon for defeating evil, Jesus is worshipped as a local god, a hearth god or a god of harvest. Christian liturgy and hymns are joined to folk religious practices for weddings and funerals, where spiritual songs and dances are used. This supposed Christianity, combined with folk religion and superstitions, is not only low class, crude, and backward, but is obstructive to China’s modernization process.

Its seclusion. Most of the Chinese Christians live in the poor and less-developed rural areas.

They know very little about the outside world. For them, believing in Christianity is just for such utilitarian purposes as a safer living, overcoming poverty, diseases, floods, droughts and other disasters. Just a very small minority of them is so optimistic as to dream of getting rich.

Compared with the people in the cities, **they lack the modern mentality**,

and in fact, they have not yet entered modern eras, neither have they exerted any influence on the modern society.

The conservatism of Chinese Christianity in general.

Of course, this kind of conservatism is related to the fact that a great majority of Chinese Christians has been greatly influenced by religious fundamentalism since the 1920s. Most varieties of liberal Christian thought have been unacceptable to them. For them, a radical distinction between believers and non-believers and between the “spiritual” and the “non-spiritual” is a vital support to the meaning of life. Their fundamentalist tendency hinders them in taking an active or positive attitude to society. These circumstances are, to some degree, responsible for making Chinese

Christianity a cultural enclave, and hence unable to contribute much to the Chinese society at large.

B/3

In order to respect the recent discontent in relation to the use of the term “Culture Christians” I shall in this introduction primarily make use of the somewhat chunky but on the otherhand also more precise and less subjective terminology “Scholars in Mainland China Studying Christianity” (SMCSC) which has recently as a term won some acclamation among scholars in the field, cf. Edmond Tang (2000) p. 64f. Today the SMCSC have taken up the “May 4th” spirit from the second decade of the 20th century, but they have added to their wish list apart from “Mr. Science” and “Mr. Democracy”, already there, the newcomer “Mr. Religion”.

16 This aspect is made evident in He Guanghu’s paper *A Religious Spirit. The Hope for Transnationalism in China Today*, included in this publication. *Christian Theology and Intellectuals in China*

recognising that **the religious tradition of the West, i.e. Christianity, may well have played a significant role** in the societal development of western powers. This change in attitude is also significant due to the fact that the traditional view of religion of **Chinese academics and intellectuals has always been that of discontent and a stern critique of all forms of religion as superstition** and, during the Marxist period, as feudal and counter revolutionary constructions, which deserved eradication. Contrary to this, during the 1990s it became almost fashionable to have an interest in religion and in particular in Christianity. This new basically benevolent interest took a more definite shape during the 1990s and resulted after a few years in **a number of nationwide initiatives related to the emerging academic interest in religion**. Several universities and places of higher education established centres for studies in Christian thought and world religions¹⁷, and a significant number of journals on Christianity and the cultural encounter between the East and the West were published by these centres¹⁸.

Thus having placed this interest for Christianity among Chinese scholars in its historical context, it may be of interest to have a closer look at the reasons why these scholars have come to this particular interest in Christianity in the first place. In a publication from the late 1990s, director of the Centre for Christian Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, **Zhuo Xinping**, offers his view on and explanation of this development¹⁹.

17 Best known outside China is the Institute of World Religions (with its Centre for Studies) at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. For a brief survey on this subject, see Gianni Criveller, “Christian Studies in Mainland China”, *Tripod*, no. 122,

Hong Kong, Summer 2001, pp. 6-28. 18 E.g. the Chinese language journals *Christian Culture Review* and *Eastern and Western Culture*. Also on the publication side, a special feature has been the numerous translations into Chinese of Christian classics, ancient and modern, published in recent years and thus made available to academics on a wider scale. 19 Zhou Xinping, "Die Bedeutung des Christentum für Chinas Modernisierung" in Monika Gänsbauer (ed.) *Christentum im Reich der Mitte. Aktuelle Thesen und Texte aus China*, EMW and China InfoStelle, Hamburg 1998, pp. 80 ff. *Christian Theology and Intellectuals in China*

Zhuo divides his suggestions into five categories:

1. **A general academic interest for human civilization** can now again after 1979 legitimately include western trends and values and therefore also Christianity as a cultural phenomenon. Christianity is seen as an indistinguishable part of a collective human history and therefore draws attention for objective studies.
2. **Maoist ideology** of strong antagonism between China and the West is a **thing of the past**. Western thinking and philosophy has been going through a rehabilitation process following its very negative reception not only through Mao's reign but also to some extent since the Opium Wars on the 19th century.
3. There exists among a large number of intellectuals and scholars a **deep search for the rebuilding of Chinese culture**, which suffered particularly badly during the Cultural Revolution. Some try to establish how Christian culture in its function, meaning and effect can be applied in parallel processes of both recapitulation and rethinking of Chinese culture.
4. Some intellectuals and scholars **search for a spiritual Truth**. The violent changes after 1949, and especially during 1966-1976, and the mental strains of deep societal transformation processes after 1979 have left many with the huge gap of a missing value system. Many feel that the **hard core capitalism and the widely spread commercialism** of post-1979 China **cannot fulfil** a basic spiritual need and they turn to Christianity, especially Christianity in its philosophical forms.
5. Finally, some scholars have simply found new interest in Christianity as an object for scholarly research as they have **now been able to work with religions other than the traditional Chinese ones, including Christianity**. This is related to the upsurge in academic religious studies within the last few years ...

B/4 Let us finally turn to a few remarks on what we may term "**the theology of modernisation**" which partly denotes which basic elements of Christian theology that appeal to these scholars, and partly is developed as they go along exploring the path of Christian thought. Again, it will be helpful to turn to **Zhuo Xinping** for some preliminary elaborations on such a theology. **Zhuo believes, contrary to the trend in most missiology and ecumenical theology, that what is requested from a legitimate theology by the SMCS is not a contextual theology, i.e. a theology that "fits into" Chinese tradition and contemporary context, but, quite opposite, a theology that stands out as an alternative to what is already there.**

Firstly, the concept of sin in Christian theology has sparked an interest because it **counteracts the Chinese traditional philosophical and anthropological assumption that human beings are basically good and basically capable of turning development in a right and good direction**. Chinese cultural history has in general been characterised by an overwhelming optimism on behalf of the human race, whereas there has been little room or understanding for the Christian theological concept of human beings as basically sinful beings. Failure of several modernisation attempts over the last couple of centuries, however, has, according to Zhuo, together with spreading corruption charges and political fatigue and pessimism, led to a **more critical assessment of human endeavours**, which has again opened up for a better understanding of humans as sinful beings. To some, Christian anthropology is more in line with their experiences from life than traditional Chinese models.

Secondly, due to various ideological experiments during the 20th century the spiritual spheres of Chinese society have suffered. Maoist ideology worked decisively against religion and succeeded to a large extent in eliminating significant religious groups in society. After 1979, **capitalism has taken over and with official slogans such as "To be rich is glorious"** printed on banners and painted on walls, **materialism is making a huge impact on the Chinese people**. Such developments are creating a society, which when it comes to wealth distribution is extremely unequal, and **many who feel marginalized** in this new society and by these newly implemented economic measures **feel comforted by the notion of redemption in Christian theology, stressing that God through incarnation is among his people, which he redeems through his self-sacrificing acts**. This also serves understood. Zhuo in this way also underscores the SMCS understanding of theology as a counter-cultural presence in Chinese society.

Thirdly, the concept of transcendence in Christian theology can, according to Zhuo, be an important inspiration for the modernisation process in Chinese society. Traditionally, **Chinese religious ways and means have stood out as particularly pragmatic and immanence oriented**, a position also reflected in Chinese politics and economic structures both before and after 1949 and 1979. Critical voices on such notions have emerged, however, claiming that economic policies based on such immanent and pragmatic reasoning will eventually lead to uncritical utilitarianism and the urge for short-term success in all endeavours. This also means that all measures in human life, political, social, economic, are created and taken on immanent foundations, i.e. **they are based solely on, and hence dependent on, human norms and regulations**. Contrary to this assumption of basic immanence, **a Christian notion of transcendence offers a foundation for decisions in society that lies beyond human errors and selfcentred insufficiency and, furthermore, allows for a more objective critical assessment of both possibilities and difficulties in a Chinese modernisation process**.

Fourthly, Zhuo suggests that the Christian notion of concern for the last things may play a significant role for the SMCS. Most Chinese see modernisation as a means to better living conditions on all levels in terms of materialism, but few have realised the dangers and problems also inherent in an uncritical modernisation process. The Christian concern for the last things and the end of history, though, **enables a critical assessment of human progress in history and points to the fact that spiritual enlightenment is more important than material wealth**. According to Zhuo this is by many seen as a prerequisite for the establishment of a spiritual civilisation in present day China.

Fifthly and finally, the Christian notion of oikoumene, the worldwide fellowship of Christian believers, can be an inspiration to a more open Chinese society and an urge and a call for closer cooperation and mutual cross-cultural and transnational recognition in today's "global village". This is, according to Zhuo, **badly needed in Chinese culture and society with its traditional tendency of nationalism and inward orientation in international affairs. China should no longer be the "Middle Kingdom"** but a participant and partaker in the international society, the global oikoumene.

B/5 Whereas the Christian elite has paid so much attention and energy to the development of so-called “indigenous theology” and a Chinese form of Christianity, the common people, especially the educated young people, have been attracted by Christianity just for its foreign forms: they prefer the churches in occidental styles, the Western oil-paintings and icons, the music by J.S. Bach and the Christian thought expressed by Western writers and thinkers. The reason is quite simple: in such a way, Christianity has rendered them not only a new and religious alternative in their spiritual life, but also a new and transnationalist horizon in their esthetical and intellectual life. Looking only at the surface of things, one may conclude that Christianity in China has become very nationalist. The very names of the national organizations of Catholics and of Protestants in China and the utterances of their leaders do undoubtedly give people such an impression. However, if we take into account the whole experience of the Chinese Christians and their political, economic and cultural situation in the last century, we would reach a different conclusion and might recall the American poet Henry W. Longfellow’s line: “Things are not what they seem”. They seem so, only because they have to seem so. Otherwise they might not be there. So, is it not a paradox if we say that the more nationalist the national Christian organizations seem, the more transnationalist the common Christian individuals are? Perhaps the more nationalist utterances for Christianity’s existence just signify the sharper consciousness of its transnationalist spirit. After all, the Chinese Catholics are aware of the Roman authority over all the Catholics throughout the world, and the Chinese Christians know that their faith is never “of, by and for” any single nation, and their Lord is over all the nations.