

Excerpts from China Mail
5 September 1966

"Peking and Religion"

"Peking will certainly find it more difficult from now on to convince people that religious practices are tolerated in mainland China. Recent events, including the expulsion from Peking of eight nuns, one of whom died in Hong Kong, demonstrate once again the totally anti-religious character of communism.

"Groups of Red Guards roamed the streets of the city closing down religious buildings --- Catholic, Protestant and Islamic --- and destroying Biblical paintings and windows.

"The anti-religious demonstrations could prove to be a serious setback to Peking's hopes of establishing closer relations with the developing countries, particularly those in the Middle East and Africa.

"For several years Peking has been trying to gain the good will of predominantly Islamic countries by fostering the impression that all people in China, including Moslems, enjoy complete religious freedom. But behind this facade of religious tolerance, Moslems in mainland China are, in fact, faced with a very different situation.

"Land, livestock, and other property belonging to mosques have been taken over by co-operatives and communes.

"Most religious leaders have been secularized and religious instruction in Arabic is now forbidden in schools.

"Moslems who still try to practice their faith are forbidden to slaughter animals for religious feasts and are strongly discouraged from fasting during Ramadan.

"In addition, the work schedule in factories and communes makes it virtually impossible for any religious observances to be carried out. Absenteeism from work is regarded as being counter-revolutionary.

"Those who have been persuaded by Peking propagandists that Moslems among other believers in mainland China are free to practice their faith must, after the recent events during which at least one mosque was invaded and desecrated, be revising their opinion.

June 1965

Reign of terror

In his Press statement on June 20, 1959, the Dalai Lama said that the Chinese in Tibet maintained "a reign of terror which finds few parallels in the history of Tibet. Forced labour, compulsory exactions, a systematic persecution of the people, plunder and confiscation of property belonging to individuals and monasteries and execution of certain leading men in Tibet, these are the glorious achievements of the Chinese rule in Tibet."

Tibetan refugees report that the Communists ferociously suppressed a popular uprising in 1959. Lamas and monks seem to have been persecuted especially cruelly. Reports speak of Lamas being flayed, buried and burnt alive, hanged, shot, crucified, stoned and dragged behind trucks. One of the refugees, Losang Nudup, said that he and five other monks joined a group of resistance fighters in 1959 because they could no longer endure Chinese aggression. Wounded and captured by the Chinese, he and two other monks were interrogated while their bound wrists were pulled up tightly behind their backs. Scarcely able to breathe, their bodies became blue and swollen. They were then taken to prison and put in chains. Food and drink consisted of a mug of hot water or a handful of barley flour twice a day.

Two months later, they were compelled to destroy a monastery's religious images with picks and shovels. Jewels and precious metals from the images were seized by the Chinese. Sacred books were burned and the ashes used as manure. Small pagodas were dismantled and the stones engraved with prayers were used to build a public toilet. The monks were then sent to another prison where the Chinese guards forced the prisoners to torture each other. Though the guards would sometimes kill prisoners, most deaths were from starvation. Losang Nudup was released after completing a five-year sentence. A Ladakhi by nationality, he was sent back to India in 1965.

A Tibetan woman, who recently escaped to India, reported that she had seen many monks from Lhasa building roads, and that only a few old, infirm monks were allowed to remain in the monasteries to maintain them as showpieces of religious "freedom." In 1960, the International Commission of Jurists found that China had committed genocide against the Tibetans as a religious group. In 1964, the commission stated that the latest evidence available to its legal inquiry committee disclosed further ill-treatment of monks, lamas and other religious figures. Deaths had occurred through torture, beatings, starvation and forced labour. The Chinese had also continued to send Tibetan children to China against their parents' wishes, in order to indoctrinate them with Communist ideas and deprive them of a religious upbringing.

August 1966

PRESSURE ON CHINA'S CATHOLICS

One of the rare interviews with foreign newspapermen permitted in Communist China was published on June 14 in the independent Milan Corriere della Sera, whose correspondent was allowed to visit an old Chinese Catholic parish priest.

It soon became clear why the interview was allowed: the priest had been told to keep to the Party line. The priest confirmed through an interpreter that the Catechism could not be taught in church; children must learn it at home from their parents, if at all. The Church subsisted on the offerings of the faithful. The old priest did not know anything about the general situation of the Church in China; he could speak only for his own Peking parish.

The priest repeated the authorities' allegations that the Holy See had excommunicated Catholics who failed to oppose the Communist Government; that it had ordered them to take up arms against the government and, if all else failed, to leave the country.

On June 19 the Vatican journal Osservatore Romano pointed out that China's estimated 3 1/2 million Catholics had been subjected to relentless pressure by the Communists ever since they came to power in 1949. The Vatican had never ordered Catholics to fight or leave, or excommunicated any of them. Clergy were gaoled, missionaries expelled and the process of "re-moulding" the Catholics soon began. In 1957 the Communist-sponsored Catholic Patriotic Association was set up, and the following year two new bishops were "elected" and consecrated without benefit of Rome. By 1966 their number had grown to 40.

The interview took place in the priest's presbytery, where, the journal noted, a bust of Mao Tse-tung, covered with flowers, stood between statues of Christ and the Virgin.

Other religions have fared equally badly in China, the Delhi Thought recalled on July 9. Muslims, for example, who numbered about 10 million, had lived in various parts of China for over 10 centuries soon after the Communists came to power, Muslims were deprived of their traditional waqf lands around the mosques. Many mosques were closed, desecrated or put to secular use. The Muslims of Sinkiang lost their Arabic alphabet, and their rising of 1962-3 was ruthlessly put down.

The Ceylon Daily News commented on June 30 that China's campaign against Islam at home was incompatible with its loud calls for Arab unity in the Middle East. Muslims in China, it said, had objected to land reform because the Koran forbade the acceptance of other people's land and property.

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Most Chinese Muslims, it went on, belonged to ethnic minorities - the Hui, the Uighur, Kazakhs, Uzbeks and Tartars, all proud peoples with rich traditions, hardy people and fierce hunters. They had not given in to "re-moulding" without a struggle, but were now being forcibly "assimilated" -- large numbers of the Chinese Han majority had been settled in their midst. "And in Asia and the Middle East, the Chinese Communists pose as the champions of Arab unity!"