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## Christian Missions in China Before Morrison.

Less than a half century after Augustine of Canterbury began his work of Christianizing the Anglo-Saxons in England; nearly a half century before Boniface, the so-called Apostle of the Germans, was born; fully two hundred years before Ansgar, the Apostle of the North, began his work of founding the Christian Church among the Northmen; and long before Christianity had come to the Moravians, Bulgarians, Bohemians, Hungarians, Pomeranians, Prussians, Poles, Russians, and other peoples that make up the Western Christian world to-day, Christianity was brought to China, that far-flung land with its teeming millions of inhabitants, which in spite of all the past efforts at the Christianization of its people is at the present time still one of the greatest and most important fields for Christian missions in the world.

We usually think of Chinese missions as beginning about a century ago, with the work of men like Morrison, Gutzlaff, Milne, Medhurst, Parker, and others; but their efforts were really, strictly speaking, a reintroduction of the Christian religion into a land where it had previously gained a considerable foothold several times, only to be cast out again amid severe persecutions of its adherents.

The exact time when Christianity entered China is uncertain.\* Although there are a number of traditions that would seem to suggest various early contacts, one as early as the days of the apostles, they are without sufficient historical proof to deserve acceptance. The first attempt to Christianize the Chinese about which we have reliable information was made in the seventh century. It proved to be highly successful and led to the establishment of a Christian Church that flourished in a large territory for over a century and a half, perhaps considerably longer. Oddly enough, this missionary work was accomplished not by the orthodox churches of the East and West, but by the heretical Nestorian Church. The chief evidence of the work of the Nestorian Christians in China is found in the inscription of the famous Nestorian monument.

### 1. The Famous Nestorian Monument in China.

In the city of Sian-fu, in the province of Shensi, China, there stands to-day, in the so-called Pei-lin, that is, Forest of Tablets, a monument which is 1,150 years old and which is still of perennial interest to Christians because it is a memorial of the earliest known attempt to introduce the Christian religion among the people of the great Flowery Kingdom. This stele was erected by Nestorian Christians in the year 781 A. D. and in its lengthy inscription tells the

\* Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China.*

story of Nestorian mission-work in China between the years 635 and 781 A. D.

At that time the Tang Dynasty ruled in the Chinese Empire (620—907). It was a period of great and far-reaching development, commercially, culturally, and politically. The empire expanded westward as far as the Caspian Sea, farther than it has ever reached before or since. Dr. Williams says: "China was probably the most civilized country on earth [during this time]; the dark days of the West, when Europe was wrapt in the ignorance and degradation of the Middle Ages, form the brightest era of the East. They [the Chinese] exercised a humanizing effect on all the surrounding countries and led their inhabitants to see the benefits and understand the management of a government where the laws were above the officers."

The Emperor T'ai Tsung (627—649), the outstanding member of the Tang Dynasty, "may be regarded as the most accomplished in the Chinese annals, famed alike for his wisdom and nobleness, his conquests and good government, his temperance, cultivated tastes, and patronage of literary men." He seems to have used all his opportunities to make cultural and commercial connections for his empire with the Western kingdoms. There was a lively exchange of commercial products and inventions between the East and the West. He established schools, instituted a system of literary examinations, had the Confucian classics published under the supervision of the most learned men of his realm, and took great pains to preserve the historical annals of the previous dynasties. The interchange of products and ideas with the kingdoms of the West also opened the doors of China to the religions of the West, such as Islam, Parseeism, and Manicheism. It is said that the first Moslems came into the Celestial Empire only six years after the Hegira, seven years before the coming of the Nestorians. In the following century a force of Arab soldiers was sent to China to assist in quelling an insurrection, and as a reward for their services these Mohammedan soldiers were allowed to settle in the country, and thus they also helped materially in the spreading of their religion.

It was also during the reign of the great T'ai Tsung that Christianity had its first entrance (as far as we know) into China as a result of an organized effort on the part of the Nestorian Christians.

That there were earlier attempts to spread the Gospel there certain discoveries seem to indicate. For example, in the province of Kiangsi a St. Andrew's cross has been found bearing the name of the Emperor Sun-Wu (229 A. D.), a member of the Chou Dynasty; in the province of Fokien three St. Thomas's crosses without inscriptions have been discovered, and their form and style indicate fourth- and fifth-century origin. These, of course, are only traces that suggest a probably earlier spread of Christianity in certain parts of

the great empire. The Nestorian monument, however, is much more. It definitely establishes the triumphant spread of Nestorian Christianity during a period covering more than a century and a half and possibly two centuries.

The monument is nine feet high, three and a half feet wide, a little less than a foot thick and weighs two tons. It is of black subgranular oolitic limestone. The Chinese call it Chin-chiao-pei, that is, Luminous Teaching Stone. The inscription, in Chinese and Syriac, covers the entire front of the stele. The text was prepared by the Syrian monk Adam, called in Chinese King-tsing. The inscription was chiseled into the stone by a certain Liu-hsin-yen.

Fortunately the monument, perhaps not many years after its erection in 781 A. D., had been carefully buried, probably to save it from destruction by enemies of Nestorianism. When it was unearthed in 1625 at the excavation for a building at that spot, it was found to be in perfect condition. The first European who reported on it was Father Alvaro Semedo, a Portuguese Jesuit (1628).

The inscription, which has been translated by scholars of various nations, is very interesting and offers much information. It is divided into three parts, the first, dogmatic, the second, historical, and the third, poetical. The historical part describes how the Syrian monk Alopen in 635 came to Sian-fu (also spelled Singan-fu, Hsian-fu, Sigang-fu, Ch'ang-an, etc.), the capital of the Shensi province. It was once the ancient capital of the Chinese Empire and is one of the most interesting and historic cities of all China. The Emperor T'ai Tsung welcomed him through his minister Hsuan-ling and had him escorted with a guard of honor to the imperial palace. The Sacred Writings which Alopen had brought along were translated into Chinese and included in the imperial library. T'ai Tsung himself became, first a student of "the Way" and, convinced of its truth, a convert, whereupon he gave special orders for the propagation of the new religion, which in the inscription is called the Luminous Teaching, even as Christ Himself is referred to as the Luminous Lord. The succeeding emperors also were mostly favorable to Christianity. The Emperor Kao-tsung had a monastery of the Luminous Religion erected in every prefecture of his realm and gave to Alopen the title Great Patron and Spiritual Lord.

Although in 699 A. D. and again in 712 A. D., at the instigation of the Buddhists, opposition to Nestorianism showed itself at the imperial court, the successors of Alopen succeeded "in restoring the great fundamental principles and uniting together to rebind the broken ties." The "law of our Luminous Doctrine" spread through the ten provinces, and the entire empire enjoyed peace and concord. "Monasteries were built in many cities, and every family rejoiced in the great blessings of salvation."

The dogmatic part of the inscription presents various Christian teachings, such as the doctrine of the Triune God, who created all things; it relates the story of the Fall caused by Satan and gives an account of the incarnation, the virgin birth, the holy life, and the ascension of the Redeemer, called Messiah; it also describes His work as having abolished death, mentions the necessity of conversion, Baptism, and shows the missionary method of His ministers.

"Behold, there is One who is true and firm, who, being Uncreated, is the Origin of the origins; who is ever Incomprehensible and Invisible, yet ever mysteriously existing to the last of the lasts; who, holding the Secret Source of Origin, created all things and who, bestowing existence on all the Holy ones, is the only unoriginated Lord of the Universe,—is not this our Aloha the Triune, mysterious Person, the unbegotten and true Lord?

"Dividing the Cross, He determined the four cardinal points. Setting in motion the primordial spirit [wind], He produced the two principles of Nature. The dark void was changed, and Heaven and Earth appeared. The sun and moon revolved, and day and night began. Having designed and fashioned all things, He then created the first man and bestowed on him an excellent disposition, superior to all others, and gave him to have dominion over the Ocean of created things.

"The original nature of Man was pure and void of all selfishness, unstained and unostentatious; his mind was free from inordinate lust and passion. When, however, Satan employed his evil devices on him, Man's pure and stainless [nature] was deteriorated; the perfect attainment of goodness, on the one hand, and the entire exemption from wickedness, on the other, became alike impossible for him.

"In consequence of this three hundred and sixty-five different forms [of error] arose in quick succession and left deep furrows behind. They strove to weave nets of the laws wherewith to ensnare the innocent. Some pointing to natural objects, pretended that they were the right objects to worship; others denied the reality of existence and insisted on ignoring the duality; some sought to call down blessings (happiness or success) by means of prayers and sacrifices; others again boasted of their own goodness and held their fellows in contempt. [Thus] the intellect and the thoughts of Men fell into hopeless confusion; and their mind and affections began to toil incessantly; but all their travail was in vain. The heat of their distress became a scorching flame; and, self-blinded, they increased the darkness still more; and losing their path for a long while, they went astray and became unable to return home again.

"Whereupon one Person of our Trinity, the Messiah, who is the Luminous Lord of the Universe, veiling His true Majesty, ap-

peared upon earth as a man. Angels proclaimed the Glad Tidings. A virgin gave birth to the Holy One in Ta-ch'in. A bright Star announced the blessed event. Persians saw the splendor and came forth with their tribute.

"Fulfilling the old Law as it was declared by the twenty-four Sages, He [the Messiah] taught how to rule both families and kingdoms according to His own great Plan. Establishing His New Teaching of Non-assertion, which operates silently through the Holy Spirit, another Person of the Trinity, He formed in man a capacity for well-doing through the Right Faith. Setting up the standard of the eight cardinal virtues, He purged away the dust from human nature and perfected a true character. Widely opening the Three Constant Gates, He brought Life to light and abolished Death. Hanging up the bright Sun, He swept away the abodes of darkness. All the evil devices of the devil were thereupon defeated and destroyed. He then took an oar in the Vessel of Mercy and ascended to the Palace of Light. Thereby all rational beings were conveyed across the Gulf. His mighty work being thus completed, He returned at noon to His original position [in Heaven]. The twenty-seven standard works of His Sutras were preserved. The great means of Conversion [or leavening, *i. e.*, transformation] were widely extended, and the sealed Gate of the Blessed Life was unlocked. His Law is to bathe with water and with the Spirit and thus to cleanse from all vain delusions and to purify men until they regain the whiteness of their nature.

"[His ministers] carry the Cross with them as a Sign. They travel about wherever the sun shines and try to reunite those that are beyond the pale [*i. e.*, those that are lost]. Striking the wood, they proclaim the Glad Tidings [lit., joyful sounds] of Love and Charity. They turn ceremoniously to the East and hasten in the Path of Life and Glory. They preserve the beard to show that they have outward works to do, whilst they shave the crown [tonsure] to remind themselves that they have no private selfish desires. They keep neither male nor female slaves. Putting all men on an equality, they make no distinction between the noble and the mean. They accumulate neither property nor wealth; but giving all they possess, they set a good example to others. They observe fasting in order that they may subdue 'the knowledge' [which defiles the mind]. They keep the vigil of silence and watchfulness, so that they may observe 'the Precepts.' Seven times a day they meet for worship and praise, and earnestly they offer prayers for the living as well as for the dead. Once in seven days they have 'a sacrifice without the animal' [*i. e.*, a bloodless sacrifice]. Thus cleansing their hearts, they regain their purity. This ever True and Unchanging Way is mysterious and is almost impossible to name. But its meritorious

operations are so brilliantly manifested that we make no effort and call it by the name of 'The Luminous Religion.'"

All references to the death of the Messiah and his connection with man's sin are lacking.

It is noteworthy that a number of Buddhistic, Confucianistic, and Taoistic expressions are used, but apparently no Nestorian.

Julius Richter suggests that, since the inscription was designed for public use, it intended to present Christianity in as inoffensive a way as possible, so that it would find a ready appeal among the Chinese; and he asks if doctrines such as the vicarious atonement of our Lord and the Lord's Supper were not omitted because they were some of the mysteries of the *disciplina arcani*, transmitted only to the initiate.

In the poetical ode which forms the last section of the inscription the merits of the Christian religion are lauded, and the several emperors who were favorable to its dissemination are highly praised.

This, then, is a brief summary of the internal evidence this inscription presents of the work of the Nestorians in China. We also have some fragments of external evidence. A Buddhist document composed about the same time mentions the same Syrian monk Adam, or, as he was called by the Chinese, King-tsing. He assisted the Buddhist Bikkhu Prajna in translating an Indian Sutra from the Sogdian (a Persian province) into Chinese. "But the Emperor T'ai Tsung examined the translation and found that the principles presented therein were dark and the wording confused. Furthermore, since the ministry of the Buddhists is altogether different from that of the Ta-chin (Syria) and their religious exercises are contradictory to one another, King Tsing shall teach the doctrine of the Messiah, while the monks, Buddha's children, shall teach the Sutras of Buddha. The boundaries of both doctrines are to be kept separate, and their respective adherents are not to mingle. Orthodoxy and heterodoxy are as different as the two rivers King and Wei." (Richter.)

Richter also gives the wording of some official decretals of this period which refer to the work of the Nestorians. For example, one decretal from the year 745 states: "A long time ago came [the teachers of] the Scriptures from Persia out of Syria to preach and to exercise. They spread out in the Middle Kingdom. When they first built cloisters, we gave them [because of their apparent origin] the name Persians. In order that the people might know their [real] origin, we changed the names of both Persian monasteries in the capital to 'Syrian.'"

Another decretal is from the year 845, at the time of the great Buddhist persecution by the Emperor Wu-tsang: "Concerning the monks and nuns who came as foreigners in order to make known the religions of strange lands, we order that 3,000 Syrian and Mahufa [?]

return to lay life and cease to confuse our indigenous customs." That these Syrian monks were the Nestorians of whom the inscription speaks is probable.

This is the sum total of the information we have about the work of the Nestorians in China during the seventh and eighth centuries. Apparently the Nestorian Church in spite of its illustrious rise under imperial favor collapsed quickly in the persecutions that followed. When Marco Polo came to China four hundred years later, he found large Nestorian congregations in various cities, but it is not altogether certain that these are to be connected with this early effort, although it is entirely likely.

The question naturally rises, since Buddhism weathered the storms of persecution and Islam also, both religions continuing to flourish down to our own day in the Celestial Empire, why not the Nestorian Christianity? It is supposed by some that in the persecutions many Christians associated either with the Buddhists or Moslems and that Christian influences may be seen in the "All Souls' Day" of the Chinese, in the Buddhist doctrine of a "Western paradise of the pure land" and of the Amithabha [the limitless Light—God the Father], Kwanyin [male principle—Christ], and others. But whatever the reasons for the downfall of this great missionary movement may have been, the enterprise itself, as the Nestorian stele sufficiently testifies, is a remarkable monument to Christian zeal. It fires the imagination to think of the heroism of that little band of Nestorian emissaries who crossed Asia and introduced Christianity to the sons of Han more than six centuries before the second Christian mission came to China. It is only to be regretted that it was not a purer form of Christianity and that it did not endure. Nevertheless it should serve as an example and an inspiration to all Christians, especially to those who adhere strictly to the pure Word and Sacrament, in the advancement of the kingdom of Christ here on earth both at home and abroad.

A few points might be added that pertain to the present history of this famous stone memorial.

For nearly three centuries after its discovery in the first quarter of the seventeenth century it stood behind an old Buddhist temple in Sian-fu. The fact that attempts were made to purchase it for the purpose of removing it to some European or American museum caused the Chinese authorities in 1907 to have it moved to the Pei-lin, a spot in Sian-fu where all the precious historical monuments of the vicinity have been placed. About that time the Danish American archeologist Dr. Frits von Holm visited Sian-fu with the intention of obtaining either the original monument or a replica of it. The former could not be obtained because of the value which the Chinese authorities placed upon it. But Dr. Holm did succeed in having a perfect replica



made. In his book *My Nestorian Venture in China* he tells us: "This replica is one of the most beautiful pieces of Chinese workmanship I have ever seen. In the first place, there is not a measurement, not a character, not a detail, that differs from the original tablet; even the weight is the same." It was the work of four native stonecutters.

This replica Dr. Holm, after many difficulties and hardships, had transported to our country, where it was on exhibit as a loan in the New York Metropolitan Art Museum from 1908 to 1916. He had hoped that some wealthy American would purchase it, so that it might remain in America as a permanent possession of one or the other of our large museums. But as there seemed to be a lack of interest in the matter, it was ultimately sold to a Roman Catholic, taken to Italy, and placed in the Lateran Palace of the Roman Pontiff.

A second replica, made by interested Japanese scholars, stands to-day at the top of Mount Koya, the "holy land" of Japan, where it was dedicated with full Buddhist ceremonies on October 3, 1911. It is located just within the entrance of the wonderful cemetery of the Okuno-in, where tens of thousands of Japanese, from emperors to peasants, have been laid to rest, awaiting the coming of Miroku, the expected Messiah of the Buddhists.

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(To be concluded.)

## Die Hauptschriften Luthers in Chronologischer Reihenfolge.

Mit Anmerkungen.

(Fortsetzung.)

1518. „Von der Kraft des Bannes.“ — Diese Schrift ging zwischen dem 21. und 31. August 1518 aus, lateinisch, mit der Überschrift *Resolutiones Disputationum de Indulgentiarum Virtute*. Luther unterscheidet hier noch zwischen dem Bann, der eine Verabbarung der äußerlichen Gemeinschaft ist, und dem Bann, der in der Tat geistlich absondert. Ein hervorstechender Satz findet sich in der achten These: „Der Bann muß nicht allein wegen Widerspenstigkeit in Glaubenssachen (sdei), sondern wegen eines jeglichen ärgerlichen groben Vergehens gefällt werden.“ (St. Louiser Ausgabe XIX, 874 ff.)

1519. „Eine kurze Unterweisung, wie man beichten soll.“ — Diese forma confessionis für die einfältigen Laien erschien sehr früh im Jahre, da sie schon im Januar geplant war. Die Schrift zeigt, daß Luther sich mehr und mehr losriß von der römischen Auffassung von der Beichte; denn schon der erste Satz lautet: Zum ersten soll ein jeglicher christlicher Mensch, der beichten will, sein meißtes und größtes Vertrauen in die allerbarmherzigste Verheißung und Zusage Gottes setzen und haben und festiglich glauben, der barmherzige Gott werde ihm seine Sünde barmherziglich vergeben. — Der Beichtspiegel selber zeigt, wie ein Mensch sich nach den Zehn Geboten prüfen mag. (St. Louiser Ausgabe X, 2158 ff.)

1519. „Auslegung deutsch des Vaterunsers für die einfältigen Laien. — Dies ist Luthers eigene Ausgabe von der Schrift, die im Jahre vorher durch Johann Schneider besorgt worden war. Sie ist in einem Faksimiledruck und Einband herausgegeben worden von Otto Seiß.“)

\*) Alle in dieser Liste erwähnten Sonderdrucke können durch unser Verlagsbureau bezogen werden.