

TRUTH TRIUMPHANT: CHAPTER 21

Adam and the Church In China

The return from the captivity, which Cyrus authorized almost immediately after the capture of Babylon, is the starting point from which we may trace a gradual enlightenment of the heathen world by the dissemination of Jewish beliefs and practices.¹

THE NAME OF ADAM singles out an unusual leader whose history is connected with the Church of the East in China. When he was director of the Assyrian Church in China, a memorial in marble was erected in that land in 781 to the praise of God for the glorious success of the apostolic church. From the time that it was excavated in 1625 it has stood as one of the most celebrated monuments of history. The events which led to its erection and the story told by its inscription reveal the early missionary endeavors which carried the gospel to the Far East.

When the Spirit of God moved upon the heart of Adam, director of the Assyrian Church in China, and his associates to erect this revealing witness, New Testament Christianity had for some time been shining brightly there. The fact that these missionaries possessed sufficient freedom to plant this remarkable memorial in the heart of the empire, when in Europe the father of Charlemagne was destroying the Celtic Church, shows a remarkable existence of religious liberty in the Orient. It furthermore discloses that the Church of the East was large and influential enough to execute so striking a project.

To indicate how great a statesman Adam was and how strong he was in 781 in the circles of influence in the Chinese, Japanese, and Arabian Empires, let the following facts testify: He was a friend of the Chinese emperor who ordered the erection of the famous stone monument; of Duke Kuo-Tzu, mighty general and secretary of state, who defeated the dangerous Tibetan attack; of Dr. Issu, Assyrian clergyman, loaded with state honors for his brilliant work; of Kobo Daishi, greatest intellect in Japanese history; of Prajna, renowned Buddhist leader and Chinese teacher of Kobo Daishi; of Lu Yen, celebrated founder of the powerful Chinese religious sect known as the Pill of Immortality; of the Arabian court where Harun-al-Rashid, most mighty of the Arabian emperors, had just secured the services of an eminent Assyrian church educator to supervise Harun's new imperial school system.²

In 1625 this remarkable stone was unearthed in or near the city of Changan, long known as Sian or Sianfu, but now recently called again by its ancient name, Changan. It was the most cosmopolitan city among all nations when the memorial was erected. It is located about fifteen hundred miles inland from the coast. The imperial Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618-907) was on the throne. It is generally conceded among historians that the period of the Tang emperors was the most brilliant, liberal, and progressive era of all the Chinese dynasties. Changan was already well known two thousand years before Christ, being called "the well-watered city."³ Its history is the history of the Chinese race. Its civilization influenced all the surrounding nations. For example, Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan, is laid out on lines following the plan of Sianfu (Changan).

G. B. Sansom, in his learned work on the Nipponese, has given a splendid description of Changan in these years. Recognizing the debt of Japan to China, many authors point out that it was the civilization of the Tang period which influenced Japan, a civilization built on the splendid contribution made by the Church of the East.

Politically China was at this moment perhaps the most powerful, the most advanced, and the best-administered country in the world. Certainly in every material aspect of the life of a state she was overwhelmingly superior to Japan. The frontiers of her empire stretched to the borders of Persia, to the Caspian Sea, and to the Altai Mountains. She was in relations with the peoples of Annam, Cochin China, Tibet, the Tarim basin, and India; with the Turks, the Persians, and the Arabs. Men of many nations appeared at the court of China, bringing tribute and merchandise and new ideas that influenced her thought and her art. Persian and, more remotely, Greek influence is apparent in much of the sculpture and painting of the T'ang period. There had since the days of the Wei emperors been friendly intercourse between China and Persia, a Zoroastrian temple was erected in Chang-an in 621...

It would be too much of a digression to go on to speak of the paintings, the bronzes, the pottery, the colored silks, the poems and the fine calligraphies. It is enough to say that all these arts were blossoming in profusion, when the first Japanese missions found themselves in the T'ang capital. And what perhaps impressed them more than the quality of Chinese culture was its heroic dimensions. Nothing but was on a grand, a stupendous scale. When the Sui emperor builds a capital, two million men are set to work. His fleet of pleasure boats on the Yellow River is towed by eighty thousand men. His caravan when he makes an Imperial Progress is three hundred miles long. His concubines number three thousand. And when he orders the compilation of an anthology, it must have seventeen thousand chapters. Even making allowance for the courtly arithmetic of official historians, these are enormous undertakings; and though the first T'ang emperors were rather less immoderate, they did nothing that was not huge or magnificent. To the Japanese it must have been staggering.⁴

The famous monumental stone now stands in the Pei Lin (forest of tablets) in the western suburb of Changan.⁵ It was set up by imperial direction to commemorate the bringing of Christianity to China. Dug out of the ground by accident in 1625, where it evidently had lain buried for nearly a thousand years, this marble monument ranks in importance with the Rosetta stone of Egypt or the Behistun inscription in Persia. It has engraved upon it 1,900 Chinese characters reinforced by fifty Syriac words and seventy names in Syriac. The mother tongue of the Christian newcomers and the official tongue of the Assyrian Church was Syriac.⁶ The unearthing of this corroborating evidence to the greatness of early Christianity in China created a profound impression upon scholars in all countries.⁷ Many works have been written about it. The revealing facts embedded in the chiseled letters never cease to grip the attention of anyone interested in the history of the true church.

How great was the degree of civilization in these days throughout central Asia and the East may be seen in the following quotation from a recognized author:

With unexampled honors, Kao-Tsung and his empress received back to China, in 645, *The Prince of Pilgrims*, Huen T'sang, after his sixteen years' pilgrimage of over 100,000 miles to Fo-de-fang, the Holy Land of India, in search of precious sutras and "the true, good law," finding everywhere, among the tribes of central Asia, the highest degree of civilization and religious devotion.⁸

Hsuan Tsang was beginning his research journey just after Columbanus had finished his glorious labors. The Celtic Columbanus, however, carried his Bible with him as he journeyed east, while Hsuan Tsang traveled west from his native China to obtain the scriptures of Buddha in India.

Many who have written about this great stone mistakenly call it the Nestorian monument. The word "Nestorian" is nowhere found on it. In fact, the inscription has no reference whatever to either Nestorius or Nestorians. Moreover, it does explicitly recognize the head of the Church of the East by

giving the name and the date of the patriarch of Bagdad, Persia, who at that time was ruler of the church in its vast extent. These are the words as translated from the Syriac: "In the day of our Father of Fathers, My Lord Hanan-isho, Catholicos, Patriarch.... In the year one thousand and ninety-two of the Greeks. (1092-311= A.D. 781)"⁹ The title at the head of the monument, engraved in nine Chinese characters, as translated in Saeki's book is, "A Monument Commemorating the Propagation of the Ta-Chin Luminous Religion in the Middle Kingdom." Ta-Chin, this author asserts, was the Chinese name of Judea, and the "luminous religion" was the term they then used for Christianity.

In the period in which this monumental witness was erected in China, three great empires ruled the world. In the West, the pope crowned Charlemagne on Christmas Day, 800, as head of the newly created Holy Roman Empire. In the Far East the Chinese world, considered by some at that time, the strongest of all states, was ruled by the Tang dynasty. Between these lay the mighty Arabian Empire. The most famous emperor in the history of this Arabian imperium was Harun-al-Rashid.

There was much to facilitate the contact between Persia and China at this time. Most of the nations lying between them were well populated. Travel was frequent, the highways were well cared for, and an abundance of vehicles and inns to facilitate merchants and tourists was at hand.¹⁰ It would yet be many a century before the devastations of the Mongols and the ravages of Tamerlane would lay these countries desolate. The population was large enough to keep back the encroaching sands which later buried many a fine city. The Buddhists of China were constantly traveling west, especially to India, to obtain ancient writings of the faith.¹¹ Much evidence goes to prove, moreover, that the rulers of China were tolerant of, or indifferent to, all faiths, so that the door was open to the arrival of new religions.

Did Confucius Counterfeit Daniel's Religion?

About five hundred years before the commencement of the Christian Era a great stir seems to have taken place in Indo-Aryan, as in Grecian minds, and indeed in thinking minds everywhere throughout the then-civilized world. Thus when Buddha arose in India, Greece had her thinker in Pythagoras, Persia, in Zoroaster, and China in Confucius.¹²

In a former chapter it was stated that within a hundred years after the death of the prophet Daniel, Zoroastrianism flourished in Persia, Buddhism rose in India, and Confucianism began in China. ¹³ From Pythagoras, possibly a pupil of Zoroaster, philosophy had obtained its grip upon Greece. According to the dates generally assigned to Daniel and Confucius, the founder of Confucianism was about fourteen years of age when the great prophet died. There is a striking similarity between parts of the philosophy of Pythagoras and that of Confucius. A quotation from a well-known author will show the close relationship between Buddhism and Confucianism:

It is related that a celebrated Chinese sage, known as 'the noble-minded Fu,' when asked whether he was a Buddhist priest, pointed to his Taoist cap; when asked whether he was a Taoist, pointed to his Confucianist shoes; and finally, being asked whether he was a Confucianist, pointed to his Buddhist scarf.¹⁴

As the Jews had been dispersed throughout all nations, the stirring prophecies of Daniel were disseminated everywhere. These led all peoples to look with hope for the coming of the great Restorer. The Magi who journeyed from the East to worship at the Savior's manger are but an example of those who were stirred by the promise of the Coming One. Suetonius and Tacitus, Roman historians of the first century A.D., bear witness to the universal expectation of a coming Messiah.

The prophecy of Buddha concerning the predicted Prophet is another example. Buddha said: "Five hundred years after my death, a Prophet will arise who will found His teaching upon the fountain of all the Buddhas. When that One comes, believe in Him, and you shall receive incalculable blessings!"¹⁵

Also it is reported that Confucius, the famous founder of China's national religion in the sixth century B.C., said that "a saint should be born in the West who would restore to China the lost knowledge of the sacred tripod."¹⁶

It must not be concluded that the Chinese emperor, surrounded by the greatest scholars of his realm, took an astonishing decision to permit Adam to build the celebrated stone monument solely because he was influenced by the teachings which he heard from the Christian missionaries of that date. He and his scholars were well aware of the remarkable events which crowded the history touching the Church of the East. The Chinese were not ignorant of the expansion of Christianity among the nations of central Asia.

Furthermore, it is not without solid basis that commentators claim that China is contemplated in the well-known prophecy of Isaiah which foresees converts to the gospel as coming from the land of Sinim. There are scholars of research who conclude that the original Chinese colonists who settled on the western branch of the Yellow River came from the plains of the Euphrates.¹⁷ It must be true that the great facts of early Bible history were known in some form in the Orient from early days, there being much travel back and forth from Persia to China. As Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, so the Separatists from the Tigris and Euphrates valleys are considered by some to have taken their long trek through Turkestan to the Wei River of northwestern China carrying many elements of Chaldean civilization to that region.¹⁸ From the Babylonian plains they are reckoned to have brought many religious and astronomical observances which they practiced in China, among which was the honor bestowed upon a weekly period of seven days.¹⁹

How early and how influential the Jews (being repeatedly carried as captives to the East) were in China before the Christian Era, may be seen in the following quotations:

Many of those Israelites whom God dispersed among the nations, by means of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, found their way to China, and were employed (says the celebrated chronicler Pere Gaubil) in important military posts, some becoming provincial governors, ministers of state, and learned professors. Pere Gaubil states positively that there were Jews in China during the fighting states period, i.e., 481-221 B.C.²⁰

Thus we know that China in Daniel's day was in contact with the Old Testament religion.

According to *Spring and Autumn*, a book compiled by Confucius himself in 481 B.C., notice is taken of the frequent arrival of "the white foreigners." Saeki thinks that these could be from the plains of Mesopotamia. The vigorous earlier Han dynasty (206 B.C. to A.D. 9) carried its conquests far to the west and to the Babylonian plains.²¹ Study in a previous chapter touching the work of the apostle Thomas in India cites the old tradition that after he had founded Christianity in the Hindu peninsula, he then brought the gospel to the country of the Yellow River.²² The apostle Paul in his day said that the gospel had been carried "to the ends of the world." How strong was the gospel in China is seen in the statement of the Ante-Nicene Father Amobius, written about 300, which enumerated that nation as one of the Oriental peoples among whom the church was established.²³ Also it is to be noticed that Isaac, the patriarch of the Assyrian Church, ordained a metropolitan for China in 411. As metropolitans

usually were directors of from six to eight supervisors of church provinces, each of which in turn was the presiding officer over many clergy, it can readily be understood that Christianity, in order to have had such a large growth, must early have been planted in the Middle Kingdom, or China.

Returning to the discussion of the Old Testament teachings in China long before Christ, it may be seen that the teachings of the Old Testament came to China not only by way of India, but also by way of Turkestan. During the period in which the counterfeiting of the Old testament by heathen religions began, King Darius, the able Persian organizer, effected the conquest of Bactria. That rich and prosperous kingdom lying between the northeast of Persia proper and the Oxus River is said to have contained a thousand towns.²⁴ Darius pushed his conquests on to the famous city of Khotan in Turkestan.²⁵ This was a pivotal city in the commerce and travel between China and Bactria. Between Khotan and China unnumbered cities, since buried by the moving sands, covered the territory of eastern Turkestan. "Where anciently were the seats of flourishing cities and prosperous communities," says a Chinese chronicler speaking of this region, "is nothing now to be seen but a vast desert; all has been buried in the sands."²⁶ It was centuries after the Christian Era before these cities began to disappear.²⁷

In Turkestan the road to China was flanked by many cities; consequently, the roads had so many travelers that no one had need to search out companions for his journey. The roads, moreover, were then in such splendid condition that the journey from Khotan to China could be completed in fourteen days.²⁸ Thus, the bewitching story of the new and aggressive religion in the west could spread eastward quickly on the lips of travelers.

If the revolution brought about by Confucius is considered in the light of the generations influenced and the length of its duration, it can be reckoned as one of the greatest revolutions in history. For two thousand years Confucianism held undisputed sway over the Chinese people. Being a man of the highest literary ability and one that was conversant with current events of his time by means of travelers, Confucius could not have been without foresight enough to make his system of religion escape too great competition with Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and Judaism. He found China politically and religiously in chaos. He gave to his native land a religion and a code of social ethics which stood for centuries. It is believed that he understood and profited by the great reformation which had just taken place in Judaism, and that he incorporated in the new system he was premeditating, ideas from not only Judaism, but also from Zoroastrianism and Buddhism. It seems most logical to believe that Confucius beheld the great movements just mentioned, and by his superior ability saw his opportunity to do the same for China.

Consider how great was the reform which came to Judaism in the days of Daniel, and how the heathen received much of their wisdom from the Old Testament. George Rawlinson, historian of the ancient civilizations, writes:

Parallel with the decline of the old Semitic idolatry was the advance of its direct antithesis, pure spiritual monotheism. The same blow which laid the Babylonian religion in the dust struck off the fetters from Judaism.... The return from the captivity, which Cyrus authorized almost immediately after the capture of Babylon, is the starting point from which we may trace a gradual enlightenment of the heathen world by the dissemination of Jewish beliefs and practices.²⁹

While these three founders of new religions - Zoroaster, Buddha, and Confucius - were willing to borrow from a cult earlier than their own, it is evident that in order to escape the charge of copying,

they would want their own system not to be a duplication of the one from which they borrowed. There is sufficient basis in the teachings of Confucius to conclude that he, like Buddha and Zoroaster, was stimulated enough by the new light shining in the west to launch a religious system of his own.

The fundamental truth of the Supreme Being was impressed so powerfully upon Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Confucianism that in the establishing of their schemes of religion, they maintained one chief deity. The elimination of lesser divinities in favor of one God over all, such as the Old Testament had taught for centuries, won immediate favor with the masses.

One more point will be presented as an outstanding evidence that the teachings of the Old Testament were known and imitated throughout the Far East. The knowledge of creation's seven days had been so deeply impressed upon Oriental peoples that it wove itself into all religious life and customs of the Orient. Speaking of the widespread influence of the Old Testament system of worship, Thomas M'Clatchie writes:

According to the Zend-Avesta, the God Ormuzd (Adam or Noah deified), created the world at six different intervals, amounting in all to a whole year; man, in almost exact conformity with the Mosaic account, being created in the sixth period. The Etrurians state that God (Adam or Noah) created the world in six thousand years; man alone being created in the sixth millenary. Eusebius mentions several of the ancient poets who attached a superior degree of sanctity to the seventh day. Hesiod and Homer do so, and also Callimachus and Linus. Porphyry says that the Phenicians dedicated one day in seven to their god Cronus (Adam appearing in Noah). Aulus Gellius states that some of the heathen philosophers used to frequent the temples on the seventh day; Lucian mentions the seventh day as a holiday. The ancient Arabians observed a Sabbath before the era of Mohammed. The mode of reckoning by "seven days," prevailed alike amongst the Indians, the Egyptians, the Celts, the Slavonians, the Greeks and the Romans. Josephus then makes no groundless statement when he says, 'there is not any city of the Grecians, nor any of the barbarians, nor any nation whatsoever, whither our custom of resting on the seventh day hath not come!' Dion Cassius deduces this universal practice of computing by weeks from the Egyptians, but he should have said from the primitive ancestors of the Egyptians, who were equally the ancestors of all mankind. Theophilus of Antioch states as a palpable fact, that the seventh day was everywhere considered sacred; and Philo (apud Grot. et Gale) declares the seventh day to be a festival, not of this or of that city, but of the universe.³⁰

Especially to be noted in the above citation is the reckoning by seven days not only in India, but also among the Celts, Slavs, Greeks, and Romans. Homer and Hesiod, who lived about the ninth and eighth centuries before Christ, are included in those believing in the sacredness of the seventh day. Such was the powerful influence of the Old Testament in not only European, but also Oriental lands, even to the determining of their division of time.

Already mention has been made of the large number of Jews who dwelt in China after 400 B.C. Throughout the centuries they observed the seventh day for the Sabbath, and one author, writing in recent years of his investigations touching the small remnant of these Jews still remaining in China, says, "They keep the Sabbath quite as strictly as do the Jews in Europe."³¹

If honoring the seventh day was true among the ancient inhabitants of the land of Chaldea, from which it is asserted that the ancestors of the Chinese came, it was also prominently true in ancient China. A passage from one of the classical works of Confucius, written about 500 B.C., is as follows: "The ancient kings on this culminating day (i.e., the seventh) closed their gates, the merchants did not travel and the

princes did not inspect their domains."³² Charles de Harlez adds, "It was a sort of a day of rest."³³ All the evidences therefore would seem to support the conclusion that Confucius was influenced either directly or indirectly by the teachings of the Old Testament in general and by the visions of Daniel in particular.

Christianity's Early Growth in China

At the time of the erection of the celebrated stone monument, missionaries of Adam's faith had penetrated everywhere throughout central Asia, and already possessed multiplied churches in China. How far these evangelists had spread the knowledge of Adam's mother tongue, the Syriac, may be gathered in the following words of Ernest Renan:

It will be seen what an important part the Syriac language played in Asia from the third to the ninth century of our era, after it had become the instrument of Christian preaching. Like the Greek for the Hellenistic East, the Latin for the West, Syriac became the Christian and ecclesiastical language of Upper Asia.³⁴

Even today there are in other countries many thousands of believers who derive their church past from the Assyrian communion and who use the Syriac in their divine services.

Political, social, and commercial relations between China and the western nations were carded on many centuries before the population of its capital dedicated the memorial monument. About one hundred twenty years before Christ an official embassy of exploration was sent out by the Chinese emperor to study the kingdoms of the west and to bring greetings to their peoples and rulers. This exploration party returned to relate that they had gone through Bactria, Parthia, Persia, and Ta-Chin (that is, Palestine, the country of Adam's religion according to the monument). Two hundred years later - or in the days of the apostles - a Chinese general led the victorious regiments of his emperor across Persia to the shores of the Caspian Sea.³⁵ The Chinese Chronicles report an embassy from the emperor of Rome to the imperial court of China about A.D. 168, and one or two similar embassies about one hundred years later. They also record that about two hundred years later (A.D. 381) more than sixty-two countries of the "western regions" sent ambassadors or tribute to the Middle Kingdom.³⁶

If the Chinese traveled so extensively to the west, it is no wonder that Saeki exclaims: "It would be very strange if the energetic Syrian Christians, full of true missionary zeal, did not proceed to China after reaching Persia about the middle or end of the second century!"³⁷ Another authority sees them well settled in China in 508. ³⁸ Thus, there is ample justification to conclude that many true believers were in Asia several centuries before Adam and his associates erected the monument to their church.

Beliefs of Early Christianity in China

Many documents and historical references tell of the faith held by the Church of the East in China in Adam's day. Already notice has been made of the prophecy which Isaiah uttered predicting converts in that far-distant land. Testimony has also been used to show that in 481-222 B.C. Jews held important military posts, some becoming provincial governors, ministers of state, and learned professors.³⁹ These Old Testament church members would teach the Chinese the truths of the law and the prophets.

It is astonishing to see how the Assyrian Church preserved the unity of its faith throughout its far-flung spiritual domain whether it was in India, Tibet, Turkestan, Persia, or China. The church members who

worshiped according to the teachings laid down by the Church of the East were not only in harmony with one another in these different countries, but also with the headquarters in Persia. Many writers of note have commented upon the apostolic nature of its missionary activities and also upon the New Testament simplicity of its beliefs and practices. These believers constantly claimed that they accepted only that which was taught by Christ, the prophets, and the apostles. In quiet simplicity, accompanied by the minimum of ceremonies, they accomplished an unusual amount of missionary work.

The position held by Adam substantiates the splendid organization of the Church of the East, also the strength of its position in China. On the monument Adam is called Pastor, Vice-Metropolitan, and Metropolitan of China.⁴⁰ This official title would indicate that the churches he directed must have had many members and were of considerable strength. The inscription further reveals that Adam recognized the father of fathers, or catholicos, at Bagdad.

In China, Adam and his associates were obliged to battle against polygamy. The custom of binding the feet of Chinese girls was a distressing problem to the Christian missionaries. The belief of the Chinese in the spirits of the dead, glorified by ancestor worship, arrayed against the missionaries the forces of spiritism, magic, and astrology.

The two languages composing the inscriptions upon the monument - the Syriac and the Chinese - might raise the hope that the cumbersome system of the sign language of the Chinese would give way before the better alphabetical method represented by the Syriac. The prevalence of the sign orthography even to the present time indicates the stubborn resistance to any endeavor to simplify Chinese. However, Adam had at his command a vast Christian literature for use. Saeki gives in detail the titles of thirty-five books which, whole or in fragments, were discovered in 1908 in a cave in northwestern China, all of which were the literature put forth by the Church of the East among the Chinese. He writes:

They had the Apostles' Creed in Chinese. They had a most beautiful baptismal hymn in Chinese. They had a book on the incarnation of the Messiah. They had a book on the doctrine of the cross. In a word, they had all literature necessary for a living church. Their ancestors in the eighth century were powerful enough to erect a monument in the vicinity of Hsi-an-fu.⁴¹

From Adam to the Mongol Emperors

The time which elapsed from the Tang dynasty of the days of Adam to the close of the Mongolian conquest was about five hundred years. During that time the nature of the development of the Church of the East in the land of the Yellow River is seen in the character of the clergy, the type of sacred literature used, the life of the believers, the abundant activities of the communities, and the public services rendered by it to the nation.

The clergy who led the Church of the East to victory were men of consecration and scholarship. They found the ancient religions of Confucianism and Taoism in China entrenched in the affections of the people. Confucius himself upheld polygamy.⁴² Confucius was also a spiritist; he ever believed that he was accompanied by the spirit of the duke of Chou.⁴³ The Buddhists were idolaters; they worshiped the image of Buddha.⁴⁴ They terrified the people both by their teachings and by the representations upon the walls of their temples of horrible pictures and statues.⁴⁵ They also set forth the carnal delights of a Buddhist paradise. Nevertheless, in the face of such powerful heathen religions, the Assyrian Church grew and prospered.

Buddhism in China was harsh; it provided no savior, and, until it copied the atoning doctrines of Christianity, it was generally repulsive to the people. In the midst of such darkness as this, Adam and his associates trained a clergy that was the most enlightened of the day. It was this same type of clergy who in Mesopotamia had carried Greek and Roman civilization to the Arabians who in turn passed it on to the West.

Concerning the teachings of these Syriac Christians, this is recorded in Syriac upon the Chinese monument: "In the year 1092 of the Greeks (1092-311= A.D. 781) my Lord Yesbuzid, Priest (Pastor) and chor-episcopos of Kumdan, the Royal city, son of the departed Milis, Priest (Pastor) from Balkh, a city of Tehuristan, erected this Monument, wherein is written the Law of Him, our Savior, the Preaching of our forefathers to the Rulers of the Chinese."⁴⁶

It must not be thought, however, that their growth progressed smoothly. Often they met with bitter opposition. Upon the death of one of the great Tang emperors, the throne was occupied during two short reigns by rulers of inferior capacity. One of these favored Buddhism. The Buddhists, seizing this advantage, raised their voices against the Christian religion. In the other reign, inferior scholars of the Taoists, favored by the imperial majesty, ridiculed and slandered Christianity.

A furious religious persecution against all western religions took place in 845. Some think that it was in this hour of trial that the believers buried the celebrated stone in the ground to preserve it. The time of trial was due to influence maliciously exercised over the emperor by the Confucianists and Taoists. "Christianity, however, did not seem to have been much affected by it," Mingana observes, "because in an early and important statement the contemporary patriarch Theodose (A.D. 852-828) still mentions the archbishops of Samarkand, India, and China."⁴⁷

It is noteworthy that this last persecution was commanded by one of the last Tang emperors. The dynasty was tottering to its fall. Then followed years of anarchy and confusion in which seven different dynasties succeeded one another.

Through the favoring smile of the government not only were several splendid churches erected during the early years of Christianity in the capital city itself, but orders were given to aid in the erecting of the same throughout the provinces. By this it is not understood that there was a union of church and state. For example, George Washington could be a member of a certain church and use his influence to favor the erection of churches of his own denomination without its indicating that the clergy were paid officials of the state. Such was the situation in China.

From the year 1020 and onward, stirring tales were widespread throughout Europe concerning a great king over Tartar tribes who was a Christian and who was called Prester John. Coupled with this came the news written about the year 1009 by the metropolitan of the capital city in the northwestern province of Persia to the catholicos of Bagdad concerning two hundred thousand Turks and Mongols who had embraced Christianity.⁴⁸ The strength of the Church of the East in the eleventh century may be seen in these records. As Dean Milman says editorially: "The Christianity of China, between the seventh and the thirteenth century, is invincibly proved by the consent of Chinese, Arabian, Syriac, and Latin evidence."⁴⁹