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I SAW TWO CHINAS

"The contrasts between 'free' China and Communist China were unforgettable."

By Elmer Towns, Dean, Liberty Baptist Seminary

Early last year I was invited to Taiwan by the Foreign Ministry, Republic of China, then toured mainland Communist China at my own expense. The contrasts were unforgettable.

While in Nationalist China (Taiwan) I observed that there is religious freedom despite recent reports to the contrary by the U.S. press. Their stories of a pastor who was jailed because he preached the Gospel were not accurate. The clergyman was using his pulpit to advocate the violent overthrow of the government.

"As a matter of fact there is more freedom in Nationalist China than in the United States," a member of our group said. Churches do not need an income tax exemption, nor are broadcasts monitored by an FCC, nor are they threatened by government control.

We visited the Victory Chapel, a church on the estate of former President Chiang Kai-shek. The message was evangelical. The late Chiang Kai-shek, first president of the Republic of China, his father-in-law and Sun Yat-sen, who led the overthrow of the mainland emperors, were professing Christians. Today between three and four percent of the 17 million population are believers. The nation recognizes Sunday as a day of rest. Most business pursuits are slowed down.

Throughout Taiwan we found seminaries, Christian colleges, orphanages, Christian bookstores and other forms of ministry. Both Campus Crusade and Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship are active. The Gideons have a ministry and we found Bibles in our hotel rooms. In all our travels, we experienced freedom to preach the Gospel and win people to Jesus Christ.

In Communist mainland China, we discovered that religious freedom is tolerated under certain conditions. In spite of the government, the church is

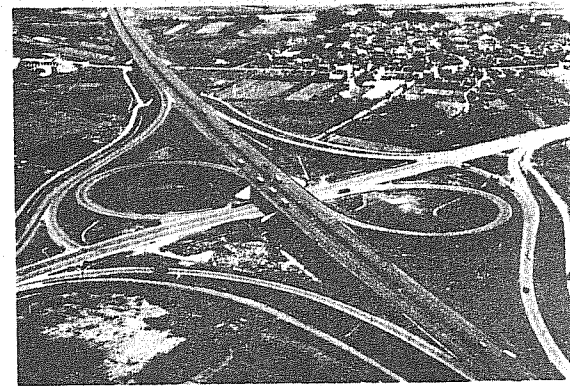
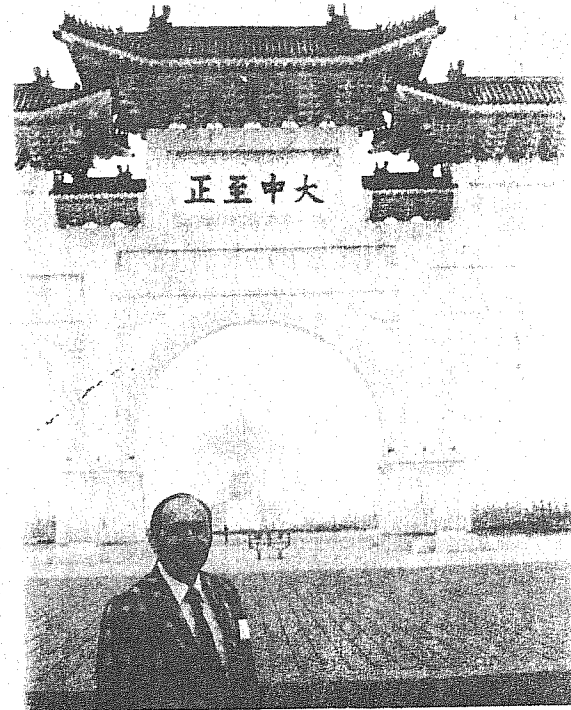
prospering. According to William Kerr, a "China watcher" with the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Hong Kong, "There is greater church growth in Red China than in any other country in the world."

After 1976, the indigenous Three Self Church became more evangelical, we were told. A large Southern Baptist Church in Shanghai was once again opened. The first sermon preached was on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. People who had been Christians, but had been underground for years, began attending church. The liberal church had disappeared. The evangelical church had been purged from Western influence. This was a Chinese church, not an American church.

But the underground house church movement also has grown since the Communists took over in 1949. One of the mainsprings of the movement was the famous Chinese writer, Watchman Nee. His group, God's Little Flock, emphasized Bible study, piety, personal witness, with little emphasis on outward organization.

There has been historical animosity between the Three Self Church and the house church movement. While in Peking, China, I talked with a young man who spoke bitterly of the Three Self Church movement. He felt liberal pastors had compromised the message of Jesus Christ.

We could not blame him. He told how liberal Christians had spied on the house church and reported Christians to the government. He said more Christians were arrested and persecuted because of the Three Self Church than because of the Communists. I felt he had a right to his opinion, but I also felt he did not represent the present Three Self Church. He lived in Peking, the center of universities, ministry, and govern-



Elmer Towns enjoys the beauty of old China (top) and the love of Taiwanese children (bottom). Expressways (center) in Nationalist China are only one indication of its great progress, says Towns.

ment offices, where most of the persecution against the house church movement was felt.

Even today, one house church movement in Peking is not aware of the others. I asked the young Christian, "Who knows more about the house churches than anyone else?"

"I do," he said through the interpreter. This is because he was one of the chief Bible distributors receiving the Bibles and distributing them to northern Mongolia and Tibet.

The strength of the house church movement is in southern China and Shanghai. Persecution has been less in these provinces than in the north. The young Christian told me that some whole villages had been won to Jesus Christ in southern China. He told of one man who went quoting verses about Jesus Christ and every person in a commune became a believer and was baptized.

While I was in Peking, I planned to deliver eight Bibles and three New Testaments to be distributed to the house churches. These portions of Scripture were going to northern Mongolia and Tibet. It is said in that part of the world there is only one Bible for every two or three churches.

The Word is preached and then the Bible is passed on to the next house church in the next town.

I was nervous from the moment we began planning to deliver those Bibles. I knew that during the Cultural Revolution in Communist China (1966-76), Christians were persecuted, many of them killed for their faith in Jesus Christ. I also knew that outsiders had tried to smuggle Bibles into mainland China, only to have them taken away at customs. Then, I heard that customs officials had collected the personal Bibles of Christian tourists and returned them when the tourists left Red China.

Dr. Roscoe Brewer, director of missions at Thomas Road Baptist Church, went into Red China with me. We followed the directions that were given us. We packed the eight Bibles and three New Testaments throughout our suitcase to make them inconspicuous. When we arrived in Peking, the customs inspector did not even open the suitcase. We were relieved to pass quickly through both immigration and customs.

The first night in Peking, we mailed a letter written in Chinese from a Christian back in the United States to his friend in Peking. The letter told that we had Bibles for him. The letter asked for someone to contact us and arrange for their delivery.

The average Chinese could not come to our hotel inasmuch as it was designated for tourists only. A guard, wearing the ever present green uniform and bright red star was stationed at the front door of the hotel to keep "comrades" out.

For two days we heard from no one. We wondered if our letter had been delivered or had been intercepted by the Communist authorities. On the third day, we received a phone call. The voice on the other end, in perfect English with an oriental accent, said that he was a Christian. Our letter had been sent to a Chinese believer who could not speak English, so he was making contact for him. This man was a professional and so could come to our hotel the following day and would bring with him a 27-year-old Christian who was the central distributor of Bibles in northwestern China. He told us to stay in our hotel room and that he would phone us when he arrived.

"If you do not receive a call by 12:30 we are not coming," he said.

That night I slept fitfully. I dreamed of soldiers banging on my door and taking me off to a cold dungeon. It seemed to me what Solzhenitsyn went through in Russia was mild compared to my tortured nightmare. Frankly, I was scared. Finally I got out of bed and prayed for two hours. I prayed for protection and that somehow God would use the eight Bibles and three New Testaments—even if I ended up in prison. Afterward I sensed an inner peace and slept soundly until morning.

At 12 noon on the appointed day I went into the lobby to watch for two men coming into the hotel together. Brewer remained in the room for the phone call. Nothing happened. He came down to the lobby around 12:45. Since our guests had not arrived within the prescribed time, we assumed they were not coming. So we went for lunch and discussed the problem of getting rid of the Bibles.

In about ten minutes, two men appeared at the entrance to the dining room. Other Americans were sitting in the dining room, but they walked straight to our table.

During lunch they told us the Bible distributor had a Christian friend who worked on the train going north, and who distributed Bibles into Mongolia and Tibet. Some of the churches in this area had only one Bible for three or four villages. The Bibles were passed from house church to house church by the worker on the train.

After our meal in the hotel dining room, Brewer returned to the hotel room to get the package of Bibles. The young Bible distributor had brought along a small well worn satchel. I must confess, I looked in every direction before actually handing over the package. I guess I was influenced by spy novels. I felt if we were going to be arrested, this was the moment.

The distributor bowed in oriental fashion, and I could see the delight in his eyes. We were not arrested, nor did anyone in the dining room seem to care. As soon as our young Chinese friend got the Bibles he was ready to go.

As he left he smiled. "When you come back, bring us more Bibles," he said.

With almost a billion population (a quarter of the world), Red China needs these Bibles in spite of some notable accomplishments in the moral and social realms. Disease and starvation, common before the Com-

munists came to power, are not reported today. Although the administration asserts there is little bribery or kickbacks, many question the claim. But tipping is not allowed.

Before the Communists took over, drug addiction was a problem, most evident with opium. Again, the Communists report this has disappeared, along with prostitution, and manifestations of sexual deviation.

On the surface, these gains should impress us because we are interested in moral reform. However, the old adage "all that glitters is not gold" applies. Many were killed to enact the reforms.

Remember, it is much easier for a totalitarian government to eradicate its problems than it is for a democratic government. In reforming China, literally millions have disappeared. They were killed or herded like pack mules into communes or work camps.

One of our problems in the free world is that some people abuse their privileges. When people are given freedom there will be corruption because men are sinful. There will be prostitution, drug abuse and welfare cheats in a free society. That never says they are right. It just says free-

dom gives a person the opportunity to fail.

That brings us back to the Communists. Even though some reforms are laudable, they have destroyed the inalienable right of man—freedom. A Communist never gives a person the freedom to fail. The Chinese on the mainland are told what school to attend, the same can be said of where they work, where they live, and what clothes they wear. The people reminded me of “blue ants,” millions of them wearing the same dark blue uniform, each with a mandarin collar. Individual differences were sacrificed at the altar of conformity.

I believe Communist China is attempting to deal with some of these problems. As we toured the Evergreen Commune, 15 miles out of Peking, the tour guide pointed out that the “comrades” were given a plot, hoping to improve the output of the total commune. The products can be taken home to eat or the comrades can sell them at the markets. When we passed the University of Peking, the guide pointed out two open markets, each one packed with thousands of shoppers. At first I did not grasp the impact of what I was seeing. Only

later when I was told that this was where people could sell their own products, and keep their profits, did I understand its implication.

However, the guide at Evergreen Commune told us that giving the workers their own gardens has not worked out. The workers tend to work harder on their own plot than they do for the government.

There are nine million people in Peking and almost five million bicycles. A bicycle costs approximately \$100 (United States dollars).

Taiwan is motorized. Instead of bicycles, we saw Yamaha motorcy-

HOW TO BE BORN AGAIN

The freedom to worship God is something that most Westerners take for granted. In fact, many of us have forgotten who we are in relation to God. We have forgotten that we desperately need the love and forgiveness which our Father holds out to us.

But God waits patiently for us to accept His gift, which He so freely offered in the form of His Son, Jesus Christ. He sees right through our excuses and false fronts, but still loves us. Why not allow Him to take control of our lives while there is still opportunity?

Read John 3:1-21 in a Bible. Then pray, “Father, I accept the eternal life You promised to those who believe in Jesus. Forgive my transgressions and guide my footsteps. I submit my life to You. Establish me in Your Word.”

(Sign your name and date. Then
Keep this in your billfold.)

To help you get started in your new experience as a believer in Jesus Christ, we will be glad to send a free study booklet on the Gospel of John to any person who accepts Jesus after reading this column. Simply address your request to How to Be Born Again, Christian Life magazine, 396 E. St. Charles Rd., Wheaton, IL 60187.

cles, motorscooters, and powered vehicles of all sorts. Even the roads reflect the difference. The right lane in Taiwan is reserved for motorscooters. Stopped for a red light, the motorscooters are backed up for half a block, all of them gunning their engines. The motorcycle seems to personify the spirit of Nationalist China.

In Communist China, there is the same half block backup at a red light, only its bicycles. And the bicycles are the old-fashioned type I felt were out-of-date when I was a boy 40 years ago. But the attitude of the rider is most reflective. The faces behind the handlebars are passive as though submitting to the inevitabilities of life. When the green light flashes on, they pull their blue coats about them and peddle into the never ending flow of traffic.