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A Visit to...

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A VISIT TO THE PEOPLES REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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Regards, Jack
Fred C.M.

The NC News Service graciously gave me permission to use the copyrighted articles published herein. The editors of the News Service issued this explanatory note:

"Father Frederick McGuire, a former missionary in China and now Development Director for the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) began a three-week visit to the Peoples Republic of China on February 3. Father McGuire, who speaks Chinese, will visit seven northern cities and the countryside surrounding them. He is travelling under the auspices of the District of Columbia chapter of the U.S.-Chinese Peoples Friendship Association."

I am grateful to the NC News Service for permission to publish those dispatches in this form, to CARA who gave me a leave of absence and to the U.S.-Chinese Peoples Friendship Association for obtaining permission for me to visit the Peoples Republic of China.

Frederick A. McGuire, C.M.

WASHINGTON (NC) I am going back. This time it will be as a tourist, not as a missionary. The Peoples Republic of China has granted me a visa to spend three weeks visiting seven northern Chinese cities and the countryside surrounding them.

In the latter part of 1932 a dream of many years became a reality when I stepped ashore in Shanghai. My first return to the United States was on April 15, 1945, the day Franklin D. Roosevelt was buried. The intervening years were spent in the southern part of Kiangsi Province. It was there that I learned to respect and admire the Chinese people. Their love of family, their sense of humor, their ability to suffer without complaint, their industriousness and many other admirable qualities endeared them to me.

While organizing relief in the devastated areas during 1942 and 1943, I could not but be impressed with their courage in the face of

adversity. I have never met a people I admired more. After World War II, while directing the Catholic Welfare Committee of China out of Shanghai, my opinion of the Chinese people was strengthened.

Now I am privileged to return. The situation will be very different. No longer do the Western powers dominate the economy of China. Under a communist regime the Catholic Church is dormant. Objective observers from the West report that the people as a whole have sufficient food and clothing, are decently housed, enjoy access to basic education, receive free medical care and unselfishly labor for the common good.

How has this been accomplished is the question I ask myself. During my brief visit, I shall endeavor to find an answer to this question. And after my return, I shall report to the people of the United States through NC News.

If I praise certain accomplishments, there will be some who will say that I am "soft" on communism. That I must chance. Every effort will be made to give an objective view. The fact that I speak Chinese gives me an advantage over most tourists. Wish me well.

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PEKING, CHINA (NC) I am trying to gather my thoughts and emotions together as I write this report.

The sun was shining as we stepped off Japan Airlines Flight 005 at the International Airport. Very few people were in evidence and we passed through Quarantine and Customs with a minimum of bureaucratic procedure. Representatives of the Peking International Travel Service were at hand to speed our journey into the city.

Courtesy was the watchword all along the way. The treelined road emphasized the importance

attached to reforestation. Comfortable rooms with all modern conveniences were assigned to us in the extensive Peking Hotel only a few minutes walk from the ancient Imperial City and the vast Tien An Men Square, which can accommodate a half million people.

Friday morning, February 6, we began our introduction to the New Society which is modern China.

Reaching back into history, we first toured the beautiful Forbidden City of the Emperors, now a museum. Inevitably I thought of Father Matteo Ricci, the Italian Jesuit missionary who patiently worked his way into this palace through 16 years of effort. I walked the paths he trod in the 17th century and looked upon the ornaments of gold, jade and crystal which must have dazzled his eyes.

The genius of the Chinese people is seen here in undiluted form. Little wonder that the tales of Marco Polo titilated the imagination of Europeans.

The Empire is gone, the Kuomintang has been replaced by a Marxist socialist government, but essentially the Chinese people have not changed.

This was admirably demonstrated when we visited a children's nursery in the afternoon. The Chinese people have always manifested a deep love for their children.

In the new economy, the government believes that women as well as men must contribute to the productive capabilities of the nation. Men and women stand side by side in the factories. China rates herself as a Third World country, a developing nation, striving to overcome centuries of underdevelopment.

When the mother is not in the home, someone must be found to substitute for her, to care for the children. Therefore, the nursery school.

Here we found 178 children ranging from three to six years of age. Nowhere could you find a more joyous group of youngsters. There was discipline tempered with understanding love.

This particular school was a Monday to Friday boarding institution. The children were not forcibly separated from their working parents in order to indoctrinate them in the Marxist ideology. They were well fed, carefully taught in accordance with their intellectual capabilities and given physical exercises which made them healthy, smiling individuals. Their dances and gymnastics delighted all of us.

The evening brought a special treat for me. Back in 1938, while pastor of Yutu in Kiangsi Province, I had a visitor. It was

Mr. Rewi Alley, a New Zealander who had been chief of factory inspection in Shanghai.

He conceived the idea of starting small cooperative industries in the interior to replace in some small way the industrial areas taken over by the invading Japanese. This seemed to me a most reasonable idea and I became an unofficial advisor to the Chinese Industrial Cooperatives and Rewi Alley.

He was not a religious man, but one who truly loved the poor and the suffering. I admired his self-sacrificing spirit.

In 1943, he went to the far northwest of China to establish a school to train young men for the task of bringing China out of its age-long technological backwardness. He continued his work after 1949 under the new regime.

On this February 6, 1976, after a lapse of 33 years, we were reunited. The government

of the Peoples Republic of China has pensioned him and he lives in retirement in Peking. At 79, he is as enthusiastic in his fight for social justice as when I first met him in 1938.

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PEKING, CHINA (NC) Have you ever visited the Amish country in the vicinity of Lancaster, Pa.?

There you will see this religious group, sometimes called the "plain people." Living a communal life, divorced from all the consumerism excesses which bedevil our present existence. I was reminded of the Amish when I spent a morning in a typical Chinese commune.

Are we frightened by the word "commune"? If so, pick up the Bible and turn to the Acts of the Apostles. Read carefully and thoughtfully. Early Christian living was communal. The religious orders and congregations were based on this same concept of unselfishness and common

sharing.

Is the profit motive of the individual to be preferred to this way of life? Forget for a moment the atheism which underlies the communist state of today and ask yourself if the economics of the First World of developed capitalist nations serves man and his needs as well as the manner of life adopted by the early Christians.

Now that brings me back to the experience of this morning. On the outskirts of Peking I visited the South Garden Commune where 41,000 people live and work.

This is a cooperative enterprise in the true sense of the word. Everyone has a voice in its operation. It is not only an agricultural cooperative, but an industrial cooperative as well.

In the area of agriculture, it has increased its productive capacity 300 percent

since its inception in 1968. With its vegetables it helps to feed the teeming population of Peking.

Its eight local factories produce insecticides, fertilizer, farm machinery, milling machines and small tractors.

Every child in the commune is guaranteed a primary and secondary education.

The living quarters are simple and not much different from the adobe homes I knew in Kiangsi some 40 years ago. But everyone has warm clothes to protect against the biting cold of the Peking winter.

Creature comforts are few and far between. It is a Spartan-like life but the life of the Chinese farmer has been so for centuries. These people are justifiably proud of what they have accomplished through their own efforts.

Everyone I saw was healthy. Simple

medical care is available to all. The children are inoculated against small-pox, diptheria, typhoid and tetanus. The so-called "bare-foot" doctors, mostly women, go from settlement to settlement to serve the medical needs of the people. The major emphasis is on preventive medicine.

The name of Chairman Mao comes up in every conversation. Again and again, one hears repeated the phrase: "Moral, intellectual and physical development for all."

When one asks how this cooperative spirit came about, the answer is always the same: "We are following the directives of Chairman Mao and carrying out the revolutionary movement which will establish a truly socialist society."

It is not possible in a few days to grasp all that has happened here in the past 25 years, but one thing is quite evident: for the most part,

the Chinese people like it.

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PEKING, CHINA (NC) Sunday morning, February 8,
in Peking was an experience of sadness.

At eight o'clock our group departed for a trip to the Great Wall. I remained behind, knowing that this would be my only opportunity to attend Mass in the Peoples Republic of China. I could offer Mass quietly in my hotel room, but in all the vast reaches of China, Mass is offered in only one church -- the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Peking -- and that only once on Sunday.

Inevitably my thoughts went back to the history of the Church in China. Here in this city lived and died so many of the early Jesuit missionaries led by Father Matteo Ricci and Father Adam Schall. Here too my own Vincentian confreres preached the Gospel

to the poor beginning in 1792.

Thirty years ago Sunday was not only a holiday as it is today, but for thousands it was a holy day. The several churches were filled with chanting worshippers. All that is gone.

At 9:20 a.m., I entered the church and found a Chinese priest reciting his breviary in the rear of the church. Having introduced myself in Chinese I took my place in the second pew from the altar.

Promptly at 9:30 a.m. Mass began. The once familiar Latin Mass with the priest facing the wall, not the people, emphasized the liturgical changes of the past ten years.

I looked back of me and saw not more than 30 people in attendance. Most of these were foreigners like myself. There may have been six or seven Chinese present. Of these, only two,

a middle-aged man and woman, received Holy Communion. There was no sermon and there were no announcements.

After Mass, in the rear of the church, I had a chance to converse briefly with the two Chinese priests, the celebrant and a younger priest who had acted as server. All the time a representative of the Peking International Travel Service was at my side.

I learned that there are 18 priests in the Peking area. There are no public Masses during the week. I was asked if I did not see tremendous progress under the leadership of Chairman Mao and I could respond that I had observed great material progress.

My guide took a picture of us three priests and I bade farewell to these good men who, it seemed to me, were the last vestiges of a once flourishing Catholicity.

The Constitution of the Peoples Republic of China guarantees "freedom to believe in religion, freedom not to believe in religion and freedom to propagate atheism." Note that the external practice of religion is not guaranteed. Note also that one can propagate atheism, but freedom to propagate religion is not given in the Constitution.

It is little wonder then that so few Catholics attend Mass. I can only surmise that the two priests I met are engaged in some form of productive labor.

Somehow, in God's good time, a change for the better will come about. One helpful step would be the normalization of relations between our government and the Peoples Republic of China. Then, perhaps, we could open up a dialogue that would lead to a lifting of the existing repression.

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TSINAN, CHINA (NC) To feed, clothe and house 800 million people is a gargantuan task.

To provide jobs for every able-bodied man and woman while keeping inflation completely under control seems an impossibility, but it is happening in the Peoples Republic of China. It could only be done in a fully planned society and at a sacrifice of many individual freedoms.

The revolution here is an ongoing thing. It is not a revolution where guns dominate the picture. It is a revolution wherein the old ideas are destroyed by means of a constant hammering home of the Marxist ideology as interpreted by Communist party chairman, Mao Tse-tung.

Every segment of society is undergoing instruction in socialist principles. In each factory, commune and neighborhood group, the

dominant force is the Revolutionary Committee. Everyone, from the child in kindergarten to the highest official in the Communist party's central committee must spend several hours a week in study of Marxist teachings.

None of the media of communication is neglected in the educational process. Four-year olds charmingly chant the statements of Chairman Mao. Songs of the revolution are the material for all theatrical performances. Newspapers, magazines, radio and television are propaganda organs.

Does all of this cause the people unhappiness? I have seen no sign that it does.

China has pulled herself up by her bootstraps. Acknowledging as she does her poverty and lack of technological advance, stating very frankly that she is a Third World, a developing, country, she nevertheless takes great pride in

the advances made in agriculture, education and medical aid to all.

Each year, the grain crops increase. Every child may receive at least five years of schooling. Illiteracy has all but been eliminated.

The peasant in the countryside is inoculated against those diseases, once endemic, which formerly took a staggering toll of lives. The aged are cared for adequately in institutions supported by the state.

The same smiling faces I knew in the old days are here. It all calls for sacrifices; life is not easy. There are few amenities, but again there is no misery. This is indeed for most a spartan existence, but hope shines in the eyes of all.

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WU HSI, CHINA (NC) Four days ago, after an eleven-hour train ride, we arrived in Nanking.

My last visit to that city was on Christmas Eve, 1948. I had flown up from Shanghai to offer the Midnight Mass for the remnant of the U.S. Military Advisory Group.

The late Cardinal Antonio Riberi, then internuncio to China, and Monsignor Martin Gilligan of Cincinnati were my hosts.

The general evacuation had already begun. There was no panic in the city, but there was a defeatist attitude. The heavy fog which enshrouded the city bespoke the gloom which meant the fall of the city to the onrushing communist armies.

A whole generation has passed. A new and exciting vitality has enwrapped Nanking.

Schools and hospitals have increased four and five-fold. Factories in great variety belch forth smoke in all directions. Progress, material progress is the watchword.

China is trying to catch up with the developed world. To do so calls for the combined efforts of every man, woman and child. Drudgery in a combined effort is essential to this task. It is an accepted fact. Life is not easy for anyone.

Officials of the bureaucracy must spend time working beside the lowly peasant. Somehow, in some way, these millions go forward in a truly cooperative spirit.

During the eleven-hour train ride from Tsinan to Nanking, we saw thousands of peasants bringing stones in barrows to terrace the hills so that rice paddies might be formed. This massive effort was creating productive capabilities.

The creation of the new is paralleled by the disappearance of the old. Things that were in China in the old days no longer exist.

Prostitution has virtually disappeared in the Peoples Republic of China. If it exists at all it is hidden from the sight of the visiting foreigner.

Woman is a worker, not a plaything for man. The feminine figure is not used to persuade the unwary buyer to purchase goods he does not need. Nowhere in advertisements will you see the scantily clad feminine form.

Moreover, divorce is frowned upon and, we are told, is comparatively rare.

The day of bargaining in shops is gone. There is one price and one price only. The shop-keeper would not think of short-changing the customer. A receipt is always given for any purchase.

One may walk the streets at any hour of the day or night without fear of attack. The rare crime meets with immediate punishment; no weeks or months awaiting trial.

And nowhere does one find a beggar. Those who for one reason or another cannot work are cared for by the state. I visited a home for the aged run by the state. The old people were cheerful, well-fed and received medical care as needed.

What a joy it is to reside in a hotel and not fear for your personal belongings. On leaving my room, I never lock my door. Not a thing is misplaced, not to say removed. Here in Wu Hsi, there is no door key. When one sleeps the door is latched from inside. At all other times it remains open.

In the old days every city teemed with rickshas. No more. In more than two weeks here, I have not seen a single ricksha and no more than a few dozen pedicabs. Communist party chairman

Mao Tse-tung decreed many years ago that it was beneath the dignity of man to pull another man in a ricksha.

Finally, the ever-present, scrofulous mongrel dog is no longer part of the China scene. In the cities, dogs are not permitted because they are a danger to health. In the countryside a few remain, but I have not seen a dozen.

What does all this mean? For one thing, it means that many of our so-called Christian virtues are being observed by a Marxist society.

If one disregards the atheism of Marx and considers only the communal principle, one might readily come to the conclusion that the present regime is ideal for this people.

The generation of young people today knows little or nothing of the great contributions made by the Christian missionaries. They are not even curious about such matters. They believe

in themselves and their ability to create a new socialist society.

The big question for us Christians is:
What can we offer this new society?

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WASHINGTON (NC) A week ago, I returned to Washington after spending 22 days in seven cities of the Peoples Republic of China.

During these past seven days, I have given much thought to what I saw and heard during that exciting tour. This final piece is an attempt to share with our readers my reaction to a unique experience.

First of all let me express my thoughts on the situation of the Catholic Church in China. In a dispatch from Peking, I told of attending Mass in the cathedral there and of my meeting with two Chinese priests.

It should be stressed that I always identified myself as a Catholic priest. Not once did our guides, changing in each city, show any curiosity about religion. I could only conclude that they were entirely satisfied with their way of life as dictated by Marxist socialism.

They steadfastly practice virtues which we call Christian. Service to the community is held in high esteem. Divorce is frowned upon and is rare in practice. Public prostitution is non-existent. Stealing is outlawed. I never saw a man raise his hand against another man. None of this has come about in the name of religion.

As I walked alone through the streets of the cities visited, I came upon the large churches built before 1949. Some were locked, windows broken; others were being used for secular purposes.

At no time did the Catholic population exceed one half of one percent of the total

population. Why then these large churches? What did they convey to the great mass of people who lived in degrading misery?

I see no immediate possibility of the missionaries' return. If there does come a time when China opens its doors to Christian missionaries then those who enter must be men and women who will work with their hands for the common good of the nation.

Much has been written about the commune system and much false information has been given.

In reality the commune in China is a massive cooperative enterprise involving as many as 60,000 people. Families are not separated; home life continues as before. Men and women working side by side in the fields and in the small factories have increased production, through their common efforts, by 200 and 300 percent.

The drive against illiteracy has been most successful. One result is the proliferation of book stores which are constantly crowded with buyers. Five years of schooling are assured for every child and the majority of the children also receive a secondary school education.

Moreover, political education is part and parcel of every Chinese life. On the average everyone receives two hours a week of socialist indoctrination.

Four years ago, Mr. Nixon promised that the United States would move rapidly towards normalization of relations with the Peoples Republic of China. This promise has not been kept and the Chinese people are understandably distressed by this. They want the United States as a friend. I know that I personally received nothing but a warm and friendly welcome.

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