

# The Good Word

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## ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY IN CHINA, PART II

### THE CHINESE MARTYRS OF THE BOXER REBELLION<sup>1</sup>

BY ST. NIKOLAI VELIMIROVICH (WRITTEN C. 1936)

#### 1. The Crimes of Europe in China

There were times when Europe used to deem herself the most cultured land on the earth. And that wasn't so long ago. It was at the end of the nineteenth century, less than a single human lifetime ago. At that time Europe kept under her dominion all the nations of the globe, with the exception maybe of three or four. Among these few free non-European nations was the Chinese nation too. But, as the wise king Solomon didn't succeed to keep himself on the height to which the mercy of God had brought him, but he fell down into the dust and bowed to the idols, so it also happened with Europe. From the mind-boggling height to which she has risen with the allowance of God, so she could serve as light and protection to the smaller and weaker nations, Europe got carried away by the winds of arrogance, and she fell! She has fallen into the dust which was covered with the blood of all the other peoples of God, her brothers. And she still hasn't risen. God knows if she could ever be able to rise from there. In 1897, the German Kaiser Wilhelm [1859-1941] (who now languishes exiled in a foreign land) alarmed all of Europe with his cry - "Yellow Peril!" It was to mean as if the Chinese were dangerous to the European peoples; consequently, the Chinese should be put under pressure, enslaved and thus made harmless. And to this call of the mighty German Kaiser, all of Europe took heed. So, horrific oppression, enslavement and plunder of the Chinese land and the Chinese people were put into motion. The hands of the white men became crimson red from the blood of their yellow brothers. The innocent blood of the Chinese cried out to the Creator of all men, just as in the first days of human history, the blood of Abel cried out to God against Cain the fratricide. And God said to Cain: "What have you done? Your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground!" (Genesis 4:10)

#### 2. The Boxer Rebellion

But the Chinese are also people of flesh and blood; and still not baptized on top of it, lacking the good doctrine of our Savior. In 1900, a group of Chinese had risen in an uprising against the Europeans in their land, whom they called - "the white devils". Those fighters were called - "Boxers", and

1. St. Nikolai Velimirovich (1881 - 1956), *The Chinese Martyrs, Little Missionary*, 1934-1938, pp. 33-40. [http://www.orthodox.cn/saints/nikolaivelimirovich/1934-38littlemissionary\\_en.htm](http://www.orthodox.cn/saints/nikolaivelimirovich/1934-38littlemissionary_en.htm)

therefore their uprising is also known as the "Boxer Uprising".<sup>2</sup> The Boxers started to kill the Europeans as intruders, robbers and tyrants. Anything European was detested by them, even the faith which was brought by European heralds. The hatred for white men became also a hatred for Christians. From then on, the anger of the Boxers turned against their own Christians, i.e. the baptized Chinese, who are thus counted martyrs for the faith, or as we Serbs would put it - "for the Honorable Cross". The suffering and death of those Chinese martyrs we shall try to describe in the current issue of "Little Missionary".

#### 3. What Does the Eyewitness Say

At that time, and still till today, there is a Russian Orthodox Mission in Beijing, the capital of the Chinese Empire. The Head of this Russian Mission was Archimandrite Innokenty, who later became a Metropolitan. As an eyewitness, he described those bloody events as follows:

*"The main day of martyrdom of Orthodox Chinese in Beijing was June 11, 1900. On the eve of that day, all over the streets proclamations were put calling the heathen to kill the Christians. Furthermore, threatened with death were also all those who would dare to shelter the Christians. During the night between June 10th and 11th, and then again in the night between 11th and 12th, the Boxers showed up en masse in Beijing and started to attack the homes of Christians, seizing those unfortunate Christians, torturing them, forcing them to renounce Christ. In the face of torture and death, many did renounce the Christian faith and offered incense to the idols. But there were others who did not fear sufferings, but heroically confessed their faith in Christ. What then happened to them was gruesome. Some had their bellies sliced open, others were beheaded, some were burnt alive in their own homes. The hunt on Christians and their destruction continued for many more days, as long as the rebellion lasted. After*

2. In 1898 and 1899, masses of Chinese peasants armed with swords and spears began attacking Christian Chinese villagers in the North China provinces of Shandong and Hebei. They called themselves "Righteous and Harmonious Fists" (Yihequan 义和拳), because they practiced martial arts and traditional military techniques. They also called themselves "Righteous and Harmonious Militia" (Yihetuan 义和团), because they claimed to be defending their homes against attacks by foreign bandits and their supporters. Western observers called them "Boxers," focusing on their use of martial arts techniques, their belief in spells and amulets, and their violent attacks on local Christian communities. By mid 1900, Boxer attacks had spread widely across rural north China, and many groups converged on Tianjin and Beijing. They besieged the foreign legations in Beijing for 55 days and massacred foreigners in the coastal treaty port of Tianjin and in Taiyuan, the capital of Shanxi province.

Source: *THE BOXER UPRISING, PART I. THE GATHERING STORM IN NORTH CHINA* (1860-1900), Essay by Peter C. Purdue & Ellen Sebring, 1901, Whiting Brothers, Library of Congress [lbc\_\_1901\_\_3g03917u], see at [https://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/boxer\\_uprising/bx\\_essay02.html](https://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/boxer_uprising/bx_essay02.html)

burning down many Christian houses, the Boxers led out the Christians beyond the city walls and brought them before temples with idols. Here they were put to the test, and then burnt alive on stakes.”

#### 4. Heroes Put to the Test

According to the testimony of heathens themselves, who saw everything with their own eyes, some of the Orthodox Chinese accepted death with tremendous courage. Thus:

Paul Wang, catechist, died during torture with prayer on his lips.

Iya Wen, a teacher in the Mission school, was twice put through an ordeal. First time, the Boxers had cut all of her body, and thinking her dead, covered her with earth. But she still managed to survive. Hearing her cries, a guard took her in his tent. When the Boxers came back and saw that she was still alive, they cut her all over again, so this time she died. During both of these trials, Iya Wen boldly and loudly proclaimed her faith in Christ the Savior in the face of her torturers.

Ivan Ji, was an eight year old boy, son of a murdered Chinese priest. The Boxers mercilessly tortured and disfigured him. His palms were cut off and his chest was covered in wounds. When the torturers asked him does it hurt, this tiny hero of Christ, replied with a smile: “It is not hard to suffer for Christ!” Then the villains had his head cut off, and his body was burnt.

#### 5. The [Martyrdom of] Ji Chong (Mitrophan)



PHOTOGRAPH OF FR. MITROPHAN  
CAPTION READS: “*SHEN MI-TA-RO-FAN*” = *HOLY MITROPHAN*

During the eruption of the Boxer Rebellion on June 1, 1900 (the 17th day of the 5th month according to the Chinese calendar), the buildings of the Russian Mission were burnt down by the rebels. Many Christians who escaped the flames took refuge at the house of Father [Mitrophan] Ji Chong. Among them there were even some who didn't like this man of God, but the merciful Ji Chong received them and did not send them away. Seeing that many were frightened and disillusioned, he encouraged and strengthened them with the

name of Christ. Each day he went out of his house to inspect the burnt down church, and to pray to God on that place.

On June 10, around 10 PM the Boxers came to the house of Ji Chong and surrounded it. At time, in his house there were around 70 Christians. Some of them made their way out and escaped, but those who were either frail or with families stayed inside. Of course, Fr Ji Chong also stayed. He didn't try to hide. He was sitting in the garden, and it is there where he met the Boxers. These heathens knowing that he was priest were especially angry at him. Therefore, they attacked immediately and stabbed him on his chest with their knives. The mortally wounded priest fell under a fig tree and gave his soul to God. Then the heathens burst inside the house and killed all the other Christians who were there.

In 1903, in time of peace for the Chinese Empire, in Beijing a church dedicated to the Martyrs was constructed. The body of the holy martyr Ji Chong, together with the bodies of other Chinese martyrs were buried under the altar. On the spot where Ji Chong was killed, a large cross was erected. Each year on June 10, the Day of the Chinese Martyrs, following the Service in the church, a procession is performed to the Cross, where a solemn commemoration is held. So, this is how gloriously he ended his earthly life, this unwavering warrior of Christ, and made his abode in the Kingdom of Heaven. From there Ji Chong appeared to his countrymen when they were put to test, and as their protecting angel encouraged and comforted them, showing to them the crowns of glory.



ARCHBISHOP INNOCENT (FIGUROVSKY), C. 1903, IN FRONT OF THE NEWLY BUILT ALL SAINTS ORTHODOX CHURCH UNDER WHOSE ALTAR THE MARTYRS OF THE BOXER REBELLION WERE BURIED

#### 6. The Martyrdom of a Family

The priest Ji Chong had a wife Tatiana from the Li family, and also three sons: Isaiah, Sergius and John. Isaiah was married to his wife Mary. All but the middle son Sergius, who is now archpriest, were killed for Christ at the same time.

Tatiana was 44 then. On that terrible night of June 10, she somehow survived, but the following day was captured by the Boxers. She was caught together with 18 other Chinese Christians, and they were all led out of the city through *Andingmen* Gate and taken to the Boxer stronghold of *Xiaoyingfang*. Here they beheaded Tatiana and the others. On that place now there is an Orthodox Shelter for the poor called “Triangle”.

Isaiah was 23 years old. He served in the artillery units. On June 7 he was captured by the Boxers. Knowing him from

earlier as a Christian, they beheaded him on the main street at Pingzemen Gate.

John was only 8. The same night when his father, the priest Ji Chong was killed, the Boxers caught little John and then flayed the skin from his back, cut off his nose and toes. His aunt Mary managed somehow to save him from death and hid him in the lavatory. The next day he was found with no shoes or clothes at the door, and they asked him does it hurt. The youngster replied — “nothing hurts”. The power of Christ had subdued the pain. The street children laughed at him and called him — “*ermaozi*”. This Chinese word means — “devil’s servant”. This the pagan Chinese used to call the Christians. Little John answered to this: “I believe in the true God and I am not *ermaozi*.” When he asked for water, they didn’t give it to him. Protasius Chang and Irodion Xu, then still unbaptized, testified to have seen the child with the wounds on his back and legs. The wounds were very deep, but he didn’t feel any pain. When the Boxers caught him again, John peacefully and with no fear followed them “as lamb for slaughter”. On the road, an old man saw him and took pity on him, saying: “What is the fault of this child. It is his parents who made him a devil’s servant.” Others mocked him because of his tattered walk. But John didn’t pay any attention to that, and neither did his murderers, the Boxers, who had taken him to be killed.

Mary, the wife of Isaiah and the daughter-in-law of the priest Ji Chong, was 19 years old. Two days before the pogrom, she came to the house of her father-in-law, wishing to die close to him. When on June 10 the Boxers surrounded the priest’s house, Mary tried to help the others to save themselves. She led them out of the house and assisted them in climbing the garden wall in order to escape. At that moment the Boxers and the soldiers burst inside. Then Mary boldly stood up to them and started to denounce them for killing so many people with no trial. The attackers froze and didn’t dare to kill Mary. But afterwards she was wounded in her arm and leg. Her brother-in-law Sergius tried three times to convince her to back down and avoid death, but Mary heroically replied: “I am born here near the church of the Most Holy Mother of God, and I want also to die here!” And she stayed there. Later, the Boxers found and killed the blessed Mary.

This is how these Chinese Orthodox Christians were killed and received the crown of martyrdom.<sup>3</sup> Their courage in recognizing Christ as God and Lord before the unbelievers, as well as their fearless and steadfast death, reminds us of the ancient Christian confessors and martyrs in the lands closer to us.

### 7. Albazianians

Among the martyrs who had died for our Lord Jesus Christ, there were many Albazianians. They are the offspring of those renowned Albazianians, who in 1685 brought the light of Christ’s Orthodox Faith to Beijing, the capital of China. Not everyone can be a martyr for Christ. It is given only to those who cherish a profound love for their Living Lord. Martyrdom, i.e. to die with the death He Himself had died, is a special honor bestowed by Christ. According to the great love and faithfulness of the old Albazianians, our Lord rewarded

3. An excellent source document on this: *Accounts of the Martyrs of the Chinese Orthodox Church who fell victim in Beijing in 1900*, **Китайский благовестник**, 1935, in Chinese, Russian, and English, [http://www.orthodox.cn/history/martyrs/index\\_en.html](http://www.orthodox.cn/history/martyrs/index_en.html)

their posterity with a crown of martyrdom. The Albazianians originate from a Mongol tribe living in the south of Russian Siberia, who in the XVII Century had received the Orthodox Faith.

The Albazianian Kui Ling and Hai Qun, together with their brother Vitus and the Albazianian woman Anna Rui, as well as many other Albazianians, bravely accepted death, fearing not those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul (Matthew 10:20). First, they were tortured and then they were killed in different ways by the heathens. Profoundly moving must have been seeing how these wonderful martyrs prayed on their knees to God to forgive their tormenters who at that moment were preparing their swords to kill them. Such events in XX Century heathen China were identical to those in the first days after Christ in Jerusalem ...



ICON: HOLY CHINESE MARTYRS OF THE BOXER REBELLION


### 8. Repose, O Lord!

In the bloody year of 1900, the Orthodox community of Beijing was quite small. It consisted of only 1000 Orthodox Chinese.

During the persecution and trials imposed by the Boxers, some of them got scared and lapsed from the true faith, offering sacrifices to the idols. But 300<sup>4</sup> of them were killed. Truly, it was a great loss for such a small community. Almost a third of it! But it was a blessed loss. In fact, it could be counted not as a loss, but rather as a gain. For those who die for Christ become mightier in heaven than they were on earth. They possess great freedom before God to ask anything they want on the behalf of their relatives and compatriots in the Church on earth. [The Martyrs are commemorated on June 10.]

And God answers their implorations and prayers. With the prayers of the Chinese martyrs we could explain the growth and spread of the Orthodox Church in China after 1900. Instead of only one church, now in China there are plenty of Orthodox churches. Instead of a single archimandrite as Head

4. *Ibid*. The official count was 222 Orthodox Christian martyrs.



of the Beijing Mission, today there are three Orthodox hierarchs serving on Chinese soil. There are now Orthodox Chinese priests and deacons, teachers and evangelizers. There are several Church-run hospitals, orphanages and schools. Therefore, thanks to the blood of the Chinese martyrs, the faith of Christ grows and prospers in the land of yellow men. In China, as well as in all other lands, the truthfulness of the words — “the blood of the martyrs is seed of the Church” has proven itself. Let us offer our prayers to the Most High for our brothers of same faith, the martyrs of China: Repose, O Lord, Thy servants! And let us exclaim: Glory to those glorified by Christ! Glory to the Orthodox Chinese martyrs for ever and ever! Amen. -- Bishop Nikolai Velimerovitch --

#### **A NEW CHINESE ORTHODOX CHURCH ARISES OUT OF THE MARTYRS OF THE CHINESE BOXER REBELLION**

“The year 1900 brought its troubles to the Russian Orthodox Mission as well as to all Missions in China. The buildings in Beijing, Dongdingan and Kalgan [Zhangjiakou] were destroyed by the Boxers. The valuable library, established by the Archimandrite Peter and filled with the rarest articles on Buddhism, written by Father Pallady, was burned. More than 200 communicants were killed by the Boxers. And when there seemed to be no hope of restoration, a blessing was sent from Heaven in the form of a newly-established Mission. **In 1900 a church in Russian style and a school were built in Shanghai.** The following year Archimandrite Innocent was called to Petrograd. While there he made a report to the holy Synod on the Mission in China, and received the support of the Metropolitan Anthony. As a result the Mission and its rights were restored ... <sup>5</sup>

“Rising out of the ruins of the Boxer revolt, a new Mission attitude was established through the efforts of Fr. Innocent and with the support of the Holy Synod in Russia. Having been recalled to St. Petersburg for consultations concerning the mission, Fr. Innocent was consecrated bishop and returned to Beijing as Bishop of Beijing in August 1902, with jurisdiction over all the churches along the Chinese-Eastern Railway.<sup>6</sup>

“Rebuilding the mission began immediately, funded by the Chinese government as compensation for the damages caused by the Boxer Revolt. Additionally, nearly all of China was opened to missionary work. New churches and chapels began to appear. A church and school were opened in Yongpingfu in Zhili province. Also in Zhili province some twenty chapels were opened by a Chinese priest. In Weihui, a church and school were founded through the gratitude of a Henan province official who had received protection from Russians during the revolt.

“By 1916, the Russian Orthodox Mission in China had grown greatly. In Beijing, three monasteries were established: Dormition Monastery, the Hermitage of the Exaltation of the Cross in Xishan (Western Hills near Beijing), and a women’s monastery. There were nineteen churches including four in Beijing and 32 missions including 14 in Zhili province, 12 in

Hebei, four in Henan, one in Xi’anfu, and one in Mongolia. The Mission also controlled 17 schools for boys and three for girls. In addition the Mission maintained a number of institutions relating to the publication of books, and various work shops.

“Evangelization of Chinese increased, and by 1916 the number of baptized Chinese numbered 5,587, including 583 who were baptized in 1915. The vast majority of teachers in the Mission schools were Chinese.

“Following the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917, the Mission lost its support base and had to fend for itself. At the same time the arrival of many Russian refugees in China greatly increased the number of Orthodox believers. The number of churches also increased, largely to support the Russian arrivals. This led to the establishment of new dioceses. In China, dioceses were established around the cities of **Shanghai**<sup>7</sup> and Tianjin [just southwest of Shanghai], in addition to Beijing. A diocese in Harbin had developed out of support for the Russian colony associated with the Eastern China Railway.

“During the years after the Bolshevik Revolution many of the Orthodox bishops joined with the exile Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, that was initially headquartered in Karlovci, Yugoslavia, but later in Munich, Germany and then New York in the United States”<sup>8</sup>

[Editor’s note: After I personally converted to Orthodoxy in the 1990s, my father-in-law, Yang Yuen Heng 楊月恆, born in 1921 and raised in Haimen, China (15 miles north of Shanghai), related a story to me about an “uncle” Chen Kong Fan 陳康藩 who became an Orthodox Christian in Shanghai. This “uncle” was a very close friend of his father Yang Da Ching, 楊德清, a Mandarin Scholar under the Manchu Dowager Empress Cixi (reigned 1861-1908). This “uncle’s” son Chen Jong Jia 陳中堅 later became the head of military police in Taiwan and wrote about the Orthodox conversion of his father in his own autobiography:]

Chen Kong Fan was born in 1878. He was able to travel to Tokyo and Moscow somehow funded by the Russian Orthodox Church. He was so impressed by the technology in both countries that he decided to pursue his education in Japan. He and my wife’s grandfather traveled to Japan together to study at the Tokyo Imperial Technological University, Japan in 1905. After their return when Mr. Chen was well into his thirties and running a soap factory, he met an 19 year old woman who married into the very wealthy Chou family, but whose husband died after 4 months of marriage. Subsequently, she represented the Chou family in their business dealings with Mr. Chen and his soap factory. As time went on they developed a relationship that led to the birth of a daughter out of wedlock. The woman wished to be released from the Chou family, so she could marry Mr. Chen. The family refused and hired an assassin because of the scandal and shame she had brought to the family. The assassin murdered her at age 23 by stabbing her 27 times. Their daughter had been quickly removed to a rural village and grew up like a poor orphan. Mr Chen fled for his life into the

5. Archimandrite Innocent, *The Russian Orthodox Mission in China, The Chinese Recorder* (a Protestant Missionary Journal, published in China), October 1916, pp. 678-685.

[http://orthodox.cn/localchurch/1610romc\\_en.htm](http://orthodox.cn/localchurch/1610romc_en.htm)

6. Bishop Innocent was accompanied by an assembly of ecclesiastical persons. His jurisdiction extended over the 3,000 miles along the Chinese-Eastern Railway and, in reality, to all of China.

7. In 1919 Bishop Simon (Vinogradov) was consecrated Bishop of Shanghai.

8. Russian Orthodox Mission in China at [https://orthodoxwiki.org/Russian\\_Orthodox\\_Mission\\_in\\_China](https://orthodoxwiki.org/Russian_Orthodox_Mission_in_China)

Russian Orthodox Church in Shanghai and spent a month there. He was baptized and given the name of Nikolai. He fled to Taiwan and lived with a Japanese school friend for a little while, then returned to China, to Haimen, avoiding Shanghai out of fear until after the war [WWI (1914-1918)] was over. By that time the Chou family had become preoccupied by more pressing issues and ceased further attempts at assassination. [Consequently, it was probably that one small Russian Church built in Shanghai in 1900 (mentioned by Archimandrite Innocent above) that Mr. Chen sought refuge in.] After the Bolshevik Revolution (1917) the Orthodox Bishops of China came under the jurisdiction of the Synod of Russian Bishops Outside of Russia in 1922. Later, in 1933 at age 55, Mr. Chen married his third wife, who bore him two sons, Nikolai and Simon, both baptized in the Russian Orthodox Diocese of Shanghai. This Nikolai, Jr., born in 1933, was sent at the age of 2 to the White Russian Orthodox Nursery School at Henry Road #1 in the French Concession district of Shanghai. After 2 more years Nikolai returned to live with his family. This Nikolai was the son Chen Jong Jia who wrote these memoirs about his father.<sup>9]</sup>

**14. A NEW BISHOP FOR CHINA FROM BELGRADE 1934:  
ST. JOHN MAXIMOVITCH BY ST. NIKOLAI VELIMEROVITCH**

In China, there are between 20 and 30 thousand Orthodox Chinese. If all of the Orthodox Chinese could be gathered to live in a single city, that city would be of the size of our Prilep<sup>10</sup>. The Russian Mission there has three bishops: His Eminence Victor in Beijing, Yuvenaly in Tianjin and John in Shanghai.

The present bishop of Shanghai, John, first has studied law in Russia. During the godless Revolution, he together with his parents took refuge in Serbia. His father Boris, a former distinguished noble, found himself in Belgrade with no means of support. The mother of Fr John, Glafira Stefanovich Sevastianovich, is of Serb origin, stemming from the Serb refugees who have fled to Russia. In order to help support his family, John started to work as *colporteur*<sup>11</sup> in Belgrade. While doing this job, he also graduated from Belgrade Theological Faculty in 1925. Afterwards, he was appointed a secondary school teacher in Velika Kikinda. Soon he took his monastic vows at Milykovo Monastery.

He received his tonsure from the famous elder Archimandrite Amvrosy. Then he was ordained a priest by the Archbishop of Chelyabinsk Gabriel. In 1927, he went to become a teacher at the Seminary in Bitola. Here he served till 1934, when he was elected the Bishop of Shanghai.<sup>12</sup> The

9. 陳中堅, 陳中堅回憶錄 (Chen Jong Jia, *The Memoirs of Chen Jong Jia*, in Chinese), ISBN 957-41-1850-9, (no publisher or date of publication listed) Taipei, Taiwan, pp. 90, 129-131, p. 163. Relevant passages translated by the Editor's wife Vivien Yang Steger.

10. Prilep is a city now found in the Republic of Macedonia.

11. A person employed by a religious society to distribute Bibles and other religious tracts.

12. On May 28, 1934 John (Maximovitch) was consecrated a bishop. Bishop John was the last bishop consecrated by Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) the Head of the Russian Church Abroad. Metropolitan Anthony rejected Archbishop Dmitry of Hailar's suggestion that he retire in China, wrote to him in reply: "My friend, I am already so old and weak, that I cannot think of any journey other than the journey to the cemetery ... But instead of myself, I send as my soul and my heart, Bishop John. This small, weak person who almost looks like a

consecration was performed on the second Sunday after Pentecost in the Russian church of the Holy Trinity in Belgrade. The memory of FR JOHN is unerasable in the hearts of all Orthodox people in Bitola. When he used to live in Bitola, he beamed like a star with his own life's example. Even the immense distance from Bitola couldn't dim the brightness of this star. In the Holy Annunciation Church, where Fr John used to serve for two years on daily basis, his name is still constantly mentioned during the Services and in people's conversations. His prayers bore fruit, his love was captivating, and his asceticism drew admiration.

So, such a man was chosen by the Lord to be sent into the realm of China in order to serve as His Evangelist and light-bearer. We all wish him good health and many years!<sup>13</sup>

**ST. JOHN MAXIMOVITCH, RESCUER AND PATRON OF ORPHANS**

"St. John was consecrated bishop and sent to Shanghai in the 1930's. He was a great lover of children and especially orphans.

"Among other things he started a home for orphans beginning with eight children. At great personal risk he would walk the streets and alleys at night and rescue starving children he found there. He was responsible for rescuing many unwanted and abandoned children while he was in Shanghai, China, developing a large orphanage in the process."<sup>14</sup>



BISHOP JOHN WITH HIS ORPHANS AND STAFF IN SHANGHAI


*Reminiscences of St. John by the Nun Vera:* "I remember how in 1934, the day of the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos, Vladika John came from Yugoslavia to Shanghai. We'd been waiting for him for a long time. Our Shanghai archpastor, Vladika Simon, died in 1933 ... The day of his arrival was a great triumph for our city. All priests, public organizations and schoolchildren gathered near the cathedral on this day for meeting Vladika John. Vladika arrived, a short

child is something of a miracle of ascetic firmness and strictness in our time of general spiritual enervation." in Fr. Dionisy Pozdnyayev, *Chapter 2: The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in China in the 1920s and 1930s, Orthodoxy in China (1900-1997)*, at

[http://www.orthodox.cn/localchurch/pozdnyayev/index\\_en.html](http://www.orthodox.cn/localchurch/pozdnyayev/index_en.html)

13. St. Nikolai Velimirovich, *The Chinese Martyrs, Little Missionary*, 1934-1938, pp. 33-40. [http://www.orthodox.cn/saints/nikolaivelimirovich/1934-38littlemissionary\\_en.htm](http://www.orthodox.cn/saints/nikolaivelimirovich/1934-38littlemissionary_en.htm)

14. *St. John Maximovitch, Rescuer and patron of Orphans* <https://iconandlight.wordpress.com/2017/07/01/st-john-maximovitch-rescuer-and-patron-of-orphans/>



prayer service was held in the cathedral, and then a reception was held ...

“The first good deed of Lord John in Shanghai was the foundation of the orphanage. Vladika collected children on the streets of the city. First I found 4 children, and then more. One rich man donated a large house for a shelter. The smallest child was only 4 years old. With children, Vladika was very affectionate.

“Vladika John performed the Divine Liturgy all year round, every day ... With the arrival of Vladika John, evening Vespers was held with Compline. At Compline, one to three canons to the saints were read. At 6 o’clock in the morning the midnight service, matins and Liturgy were served. Vladika John required all the hymns to be sung. At vespers and matins he stood with the clergy in the choir. Vladika was very strict with the clergy.

“During the daily Liturgies, Vladika John was assisted by children from the orphanage. The orphanage was about a 30 minutes walk from the cathedral. When it was raining, the children came to the church barefoot ... Vladika John served in sandals ... He was very clean - every day at 4 o’clock in the morning took a cold bath, even in winter.

“I remember that Vladika John especially honored the days of memory of the martyrs.”<sup>15</sup>

*Reminiscences of St. John by the Nun Ephemina:* “There were always wars in China. The Chinese had large families with many children, and there was very little to eat. To save on food, they would get rid of newborns, placing them out on the street to freeze to death. Vladika John would pick them up and bring them to the orphanage. On these outings, the deacon of the cathedral would follow him in order to help and protect him. Once Vladika said to this deacon about a child, ‘Pick him up.’ The deacon objected, ‘But he’s Chinese.’ ‘But he is made in the image of God,’ said Vladika.

“Thus the orphanage grew. Vladika John asked my mother Lydia [Orloff] to help in the orphanage. She was not able to, since she already had six children of her own, but she said, ‘I will help in other ways.’ She went to the orphanage asking what she could do, and was told, ‘We need to feed them.’ She said, ‘I will take Wednesdays and Fridays.’ So she would go on her bicycle to the market with me beside her on another bicycle, and we would load her bicycle with food to take it to the orphanage. On the assigned days, our family was entirely focused on helping the orphanage. That was how the orphanage was supported: by various families in the parish helping out.

“The orphanage was always very busy. All of them would come to the Saturday-night Vigil and would stand together ...

“Vladika John would point out that you cannot teach something if you do not have it yourself. He fulfilled the commandments that he taught. Always he read and reread the Lives of Saints. They are living examples, he would say, of people who were like us. Perhaps some were even greater sinners than us and had even more weaknesses than we do, but they still made it. Therefore he had the right to demand of us what he did.

“He was attacked and persecuted because he was a saint,

15. *Reminiscences of Nun Vera*, Archive of the ROCOR, November 28, 2014, (in Russian),

<http://internetsobor.org/index.php/istoriya/rptsz/arkhiv-rptsz/svyatitel-ioann-shankhajskij-v-vospominaniyakh-ochevvidtsev>

but he returned good for evil. We saw him do it.

“It is hard for me to imagine that this great saint is the same man who used to stroke my head.”<sup>16</sup>


*Reminiscences of St. John by Maria Aleksandrovna Shakhmatova:* “M.A. Shakhmatova witnessed the saint’s ascetic exploit in Shanghai almost from the very moment of his arrival there in 1934, on the feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple. She saw Archbishop John crucify himself in both founding and managing the orphanage. Living conditions were terrible, and the needs of the children, whose parents had escaped Communism, were overwhelming. The young Bishop, almost from the start, gathered concerned ladies from his parish, asked them to found a committee, rented a house, and opened up a hostel for orphans or children whose parents were in need. The children would often be underfed, abused, and frightened, until Archbishop John would come and personally take them into his orphanage and school. Each child – and there were over three thousand who went through the orphanage – had a traumatic story.

“There was, for example, a boy named Paul who had witnessed his father and mother being killed and chopped into pieces by the Communists right in front of his eyes. Because of the trauma the boy had become mute and could not even pronounce his own name. He was like a trapped animal, afraid of everyone, and trusted only his fists and spitting. He was brought into the orphanage at a time when it was packed and had no place for him. Due to the fact that Paul was so frightened, the ladies there thought that he was abnormal and refused to accept him lest he scare the other children.

“When Archbishop John found out about him, he insisted on immediately dropping everything and going to meet the boy personally. They did not even know that he was a Russian boy and spoke Russian, for he only mumbled and hissed like a caged animal. When Archbishop John arrived, he sat down before the boy, who was still trembling, and said to him the following: ‘I know that you have lost your father, but now you have found another one – me,’ and he hugged him. This was said with such power that the boy burst out in tears and his speech returned to him.

“In the slums of Shanghai there were cases in which dogs would devour baby girls who had been thrown into garbage cans. When the newspapers announced this, Archbishop John told Mrs. Shakhmatova to go and buy two bottles of Chinese vodka – at which she cringed in horror. But her horror increased when he demanded that she accompany him into these very slums, where it was common knowledge that grown-up people would be murdered. Fearless as ever, the young Bishop insisted on going there, walking through dark alleys in the worst neighborhood. She recalled what horror seized her heart when they, in the darkness of night, walked and encountered only drunkards, shady characters, and growling dogs and cats. She held the bottles in her hands, following him with trepidation, when suddenly a growl was heard from a drunken man sitting in a dark doorway, and the faint moan of a baby was heard from a nearby garbage can. When the Bishop hastened towards the cry, the drunkard growled in warning. Then the Bishop turned to Mrs. Shakhmatova and said, ‘Hand me a bottle.’ Raising the bottle in one hand and pointing to the garbage can with the other,

16. *Reminiscences of Nun Ephemina as told to the Nuns of Holy Cross Skete*, [http://www.orthodox.cn/saints/euphem\\_en.htm](http://www.orthodox.cn/saints/euphem_en.htm)



Blessed John, without words, conveyed the message of the proposed sale. The bottle ended up in the hands of the drunkard, and Mrs. Shakhmatova saved the child. That night the Bishop returned to the orphanage with two more babies under his arms. This fearlessness, however, had not been acquired without a deep inner struggle.

“Even then he was already known as a miracle-worker, because he prayed for whomever would ask him, and often his prayer would be answered immediately.

“The Bishop never slept at night, but only dozed off sometimes, sitting in a chair. Once Mrs. Shakhmatova, in the middle of the night, chanced for some reason to climb up into the belfry. The door to it led from the top floor of the vicarage. It was cold and windy. As she opened the door, she saw that Blessed John was in deep, concentrated prayer, freezing, shivering in the open air, wind sweeping through his robe, and that he was blessing the houses of his parishioners from above. She thought, ‘While the world is asleep, he keeps watch like Habakkuk of old, guarding his flock with his fervent intercession before God, so that no harm can steal his sheep away.’ Deeply shaken, she withdrew. Thus she had a clue as to what he was doing during the long winter nights when all the people take their normal rest in their comfortable beds. ‘Why was it needed?’ asked Mrs. Shakhmatova. ‘Who asked him to do it? Why such self-sacrifice, when his presence was needed everywhere?’ And she answered her own question: ‘He had an unquenchable love for God. He loved God as a Person, as his Father, as his closest Friend. He longed to talk with Him, and God heard him. It was not some conscious self-sacrifice. He just loved God and did not want to be separated from Him.’

““Once during the war the poverty of the orphanage reached such immense proportions that there was literally nothing with which to feed the children, and there must have been at least 90 of them at that time. Our staff was indignant because Archbishop John kept bringing in new children, some of whom had parents, and we were having to feed someone else’s children. Such were his ways. One evening when he came to us – worn out, tired, cold and silent – I could not resist telling him off. I said that we women could not tolerate this any longer, that we could not bear to see hungry little mouths and not be able to put anything into them. I could not control myself and raised my voice in indignation. I not only complained, I was full of wrath at him for putting us through this. He looked sadly at me and said, ‘What do you really need?’ I said, ‘Everything, but at least some oatmeal. I have nothing to feed the children with in the morning.’

“Saint John of San Francisco Archbishop John looked at her sadly and went upstairs. Then she heard him making prostrations, so vigorously and loudly that even the neighbors complained. Pangs of conscience bothered her, and that night she couldn’t sleep. She dozed off in the morning, only to be awakened by the doorbell. When she opened the door, there stood a gentleman of English extraction who said that he represented some cereal company, and that he had a surplus of oatmeal; and he wanted to know whether they could use it since he heard that there were children here. They began to bring in bags and bags of oatmeal. While this was going on, with the commotion of banging doors, Blessed John began to descend the staircase. Hardly could Mrs. Shakhmatova utter a word to him when she saw his glance. He did not say anything, but with his eyes, with one single glance, he

reproached her for her unbelief. She said she could have fallen on her knees and kissed his feet, but he was already gone to continue his prayer to God, now of thanksgiving.”<sup>17</sup>

#### EVACUATION OF ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS FROM COMMUNIST CHINA IN 1949

“At the end of World War II, and with the arrival of Soviet forces, particularly in Manchuria, the Moscow Patriarchate gained jurisdiction over the Russian bishops in China and Harbin.

“In 1949, after establishment of the People’s Republic of China that was under the control of the Chinese Communist Party, treaties between the Soviet and Chinese governments led to transfer of jurisdiction of the Russian churches to the Chinese. While many of the Russian expatriates were arrested by the communists for return to the Soviet Union, many returned voluntarily. Other families and clergy escaped to the non-communist world, many under the leadership of Bishop John of Shanghai.<sup>18</sup>

“At the end of the 1940’s as the communists came to power, **Russians in China were forced to flee again, most via the Philippine Islands.** In 1949 almost 5000 refugees from China were located in a camp of the International Refugee Organization on the island of Tubabao. They lived there in tents under the most primitive circumstances. **All of the children of the orphanage were brought there, as were the elderly and infirm.** They lived under the continual threat of fierce hurricanes, since the island is located in the path of seasonal typhoons which pass through that part of the Pacific Ocean. During the twenty-seven-month existence of the Russian encampment, only once was the island threatened by a typhoon, which, however, changed its course and passed around the island. Every night Saint John would walk around the entire camp blessing it with the sign of the Cross on all four sides. Later, when the people had departed for various countries and the camp had been almost completely evacuated, a fierce typhoon swept over the camp and leveled it to the ground.”<sup>19</sup>

Note: With the communist takeover of China, many Orthodox believers left the country under the leadership of Archbishop John. However, many remained. At that time there were some 25,000 believers in the Chinese Orthodox Church, and 103 churches.

#### ONE OF VLADIKA JOHN’S CHINESE PRIESTS FROM SHANGHAI

“Protopresbyter Elias Wen ( Wén Zìzhèng in Chinese) was born in Beijing, China, in 1896. At the age of seven he on his own volition and with his parents permission was baptized into the Holy Orthodox Church. From 1905 to 1914 he studied at the Mission school and from 1915 to 1918 at the Beijing Theological Seminary. In 1931 he was ordained to the priesthood by Archbishop Simon and assigned to the

17. From the memoirs of Maria Aleksandrovna Shakhmatova, matron of St. Tikhon’s Orphanage in Shanghai in “Святой Иоанн Максимович в Шанхай” (“St. John Maximovitch in Shanghai”), *The Orthodox Word* at <https://langeron.livejournal.com/180982.html>

18. Russian Orthodox Mission in China at [https://orthodoxwiki.org/Russian\\_Orthodox\\_Mission\\_in\\_China](https://orthodoxwiki.org/Russian_Orthodox_Mission_in_China)

19. *A Brief Life of Our Father Among the Saints Archbishop John, Wonderworker of Shanghai and San Francisco* at <http://www.orthodox.net/saints/john-maximovitch-brief-life.html>

## THE GOOD WORD

c/o St. Seraphim of Sarov & St. John of Kronstadt Orthodox Church  
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Annunciation Church in Shanghai. After completion of the new Shanghai cathedral in honor of the Mother of God Surety of Sinners, Fr. Elias was assigned Dean there.



Fr. Elias Wen (center) next to Bishop John with Russian and Chinese Acolytes at the Russian Cathedral in Shanghai c. 1940

“In 1946 by Decree of Archbishop John (Maximovitch) he was made Rector of the cathedral. Soon afterwards because of the communists Fr. Elias was forced to flee China. He ended up in Hong Kong where he founded the Resurrection parish. Fr. Elias did a great deal in Hong Kong to help the numerous Russian emigres. In 1957 Fr. Elias made his final move, to the US, where he was assigned to the Holy Virgin Cathedral, *The Joy of All Who Sorrow*, in San Francisco ...

“St. John characterized Fr. Elias as follows: Archpriest Elias Wen began his service to the Church at a young age at the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Beijing. It is with zeal

and diligence that he continued his service at all levels in Shanghai. Faithfulness, steadfastness and a blameless life characterized Father Elias’ life as a priest. It is with these fine qualities that he ministered to the Hong Kong community in the course of the last eight years.

“In 1981 by Decree of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia Father Elias was elevated to the rank of Protopresbyter ...

“On Saturday, June 9, 2007, Protopresbyter Elias Wen fell asleep in the Lord at the age of 110. He was the eight oldest man in the world. His mind remained clear until his repose. He was born in the XIX century, baptized in the XX century when the Russian Church was undivided. He survived the division in the Russian Church and the takeover of his Homeland by communists and reposed in the XXI century ...”<sup>20</sup>

[Editor’s note: In the mid 1990s on a business trip to San Francisco, I took a bus to the Russian Cathedral on Geary Street with the intent of venerating St. John’s relics and lighting a candle there for my spiritual father His Grace Vladiko Sergios. On the bus I met a young man wearing a *komboskini*, a prayer rope, on his wrist, David Ryan, who had the same desire to venerate Vladika John. Together, we experienced my first all-night Russian vigil (since we had to wait until the vigil was over to venerate St. John). Much to my surprise the vigil was served by a very elderly Chinese priest, Fr. Elias Wen, who spoke with yet a strong and beautiful voice in perfect Russian. Little did I know at that time who he was, nor that he was the oldest active priest in ROCOR, and one of St. John’s treasured Chinese Orthodox presbyters.]

20. *In Memoriam: Protopresbyter Elias Wen* at <http://www.orthodox.cn/contemporary/shanghai/frelia.en.htm>