

17 May, 2013



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RUSSIA - CHINA

Patriarch Kirill calls for recognition of Orthodox Church in China, but is silent on religious freedom

by Nina Achmatova

In Russia, commentators and analysts ponder the meaning of the Orthodox leader's mission to the People's Republic. For some it is one step in the Kremlin's foreign policy, which aims to strengthen a renewed geopolitical alliance with China. For others, the goal is only pastoral: the Orthodox Church needs restructuring.



Moscow (AsiaNews) - "Is it acceptable from a moral point of view, to ask for the official recognition of Orthodox Christianity in China and keep quiet about the thousands of victims of religious persecution in this country?". This is one of the most frequently

asked questions, these days, on Internet sites and blogs of religious information in Russia, that are following the "historic" visit of the Patriarch of Moscow, Kirill, to the People's Republic of China, which will end on May 15. The leader of the Russian Orthodox Church has already met with Chinese President Xi Jinping and with the leaders of local Christian communities and of the Chinese Department of Religious Affairs. He hopes that Beijing will grant Orthodox Christianity (after Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Buddhism and Taoism) the status of "recognized religion" by the government. But he has thus far remained silent about the plight of religious freedom in the country. Indeed, he has recognized as interlocutors, the very institutions that are responsible for this repressive policy, inviting them to join efforts to "strengthen the moral values in the world."

No one expected something different. For many commentators, Kirill's visit has a more political-diplomatic character than pastoral. The tones were cordial and open for what Xi himself termed the "first visit by a head of the Russian Orthodox Church and a Russian religious leader." The mission of the Patriarch follows another "historic" event: the visit to Moscow in March, of the newly elected Chinese president, on his first trip abroad and clear signal of a renewed resolve to strengthen bilateral relations between the two neighbors. And to cement an alliance geopolitics, which finds its lynch pin in the common objective of limiting U.S. influence in the Asia-Pacific region. In this context, a more structured orthodoxy obedient to Moscow - according to some analysts - would mean for Beijing the possibility of forming a sort of "visible spiritual opposition" to Western Christianity, traditionally associated with the Vatican and the United States.

The Russian Orthodox Church, moreover, could also represent a "middleman" useful - others point out - in dialogue with the Kremlin. Beijing recognize the Moscow Patriarchate as an important actor in Russian foreign policy, with close connections to the corridors of power. The same Xi invited

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data from the Statistical Yearbook of the Church. The faithful of Rome have passed, from 1196 in 2010 to 1214 million in 2011, up 1.5%. Asia remains a religiously vibrant continent: number of faithful and priests rise, as do the number of professed religious who are not priests, seminarians, and in contrast to the world's data, the number of nuns.

ASIA - PIME

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by Bernardo Cervellera



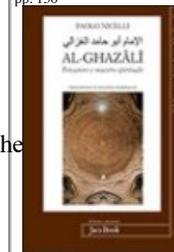
PIME Annual General

Meeting will discuss the mission ad gentes and "new evangelization"; missionary revival for the older Churches (Italy, USA, Latin America), and the communications media. But above all, the awakening of faith, according to the teaching of Benedict XVI and Pope Francis' call to "go out to the geographical and

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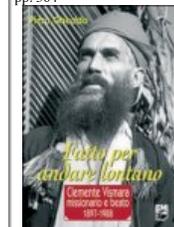
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- [South Asia](#) Kirill to "play a greater role" in cementing the relationship between the two
- [Central Asia](#) nations.
- [South East Asia](#) Russian commentators are divided. For the director of radio *Kommersant*, Konstantin von Eggert, the Patriarch's visit to China, "undoubtedly has a political significance." "Behind it all - the columnist, told *AsiaNews* - is the concept of *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World): strengthening, that is, the presence of the Russian people and culture in the world." "This is real 'soft power' - he added- every one of the Patriarch's actions abroad seem more like political propaganda, and not of a spiritual and pastoral nature."



Even Andrei Zolotov - director of the news website *Russia Profile* and expert on religious matters - in Russia Church and State promote an often agreed foreign policy. He said, however, the Patriarchate remains an independent institution. "Sometimes the priorities of the state coincide with those of the Church. Sometimes - he admits - the Church influences the state, as in the case of inclusion in the political agenda of issues such as the fight against 'Christian-phobia' and the persecution of Christians ". Despite this - adds the expert, contacted by *AsiaNews* - Kirill's visit to China "has a much more spiritual significance than political." "The Orthodox Church has huge problems in the country - he explains - the church hierarchy needs to be completely reconstituted." For fifty years bishops, priests and parishes are lacking. According to him, the presence of Kirill in China (where he celebrated the Divine Liturgy in Beijing, and at the chapel in the Russian Embassy in Harbin, the central place of worship for the Orthodox community) will be relief and aid to Chinese faithful (about 15 thousand). According to Zolotov, the Patriarch's visit to the Church of Shanghai will be of particular significance. St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco, one of the twentieth century's most revered Orthodox saints, worked here.

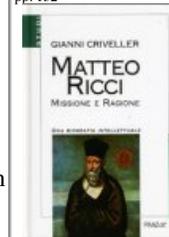
existential outskirts".

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today's general audience, which falls on the feast day of Saint Joseph the Worker, also International Workers' Day, Francis calls on the world to take "decisive action" against human trafficking as well as work that denies dignity and represses man. He calls on people, especially young people, "to keep your hope alive" because "there is a light at the end of the tunnel." He also calls on families to recite the Rosary during the month of May.

by Gianni Criveller pp. 132



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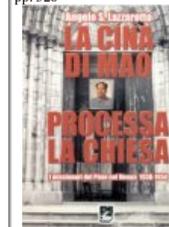
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