"Do I want to go to China? Of

course: tomorrow! Oh, yes."

Faith in China is thriving

Fr Eamonn O'Brien

It would be a disservice to truth by me not to acknowledge that there have been and are serious challenges for religious and civil society in China from sections of the State as well as the ever increasing lures of consumerism. But my sense is that too much media time is given to negative stories about China.

Yes, the communists confiscated the Church in 1949, but it was returned in 1992. Now, just last month, the tallest Church in China was opened by Bishop Joseph Xu Honggan, Suzhou Diocese, under protection of Mary and in the presence of visiting bishops, 50 priests and 6,000 faithful from local and neighbouring provinces.

More than 3,000 baptisms were celebrated during the Easter period in the Churches of China; with an expected 100,000 for the whole year.

The Catholic population has increased from four million to what is believed to be about 15 million today. Travelling on a plane one day, I had

a stimulating conversation on matters secular with a woman who told me that she was the senior member of the communist party. At that time, I didn't share too easily with people who I really was, using the cover of 'teacher'. After a lull in the conversation I decided, for my first time in China with a stranger, to share that I was Catholic Missionary priest.

There was an ominous silence for a moment and then she turned and said to me: "I wish to share something too with you: I am, as I told you, a senior member of the party, but I am now in the fourth stage of becoming a Buddhist'. The conversation took a new and deeper turn.

Scholars in China throughout history have played a very significant role in the State and the Chinese imperial court. Today, a priest in Beijing publishes a yearly a journal of Catholic Studies, circulated to about 2,000 academic institutions. This gives wide distribution to the best of catholic theological scholarship from abroad but also from that presently developing within China.

There are more institutes for the study of religion in China than in all of the UK and Ireland. Atheism is being pushed, but a counterforce is also present in these scholars and especially in the thirst among the young for a truth to fulfill their lives.

Pope Francis has referred to China .. as a great country. But more than a country, a great culture with inexhaustible wisdom".

We have a penchant in Europe for nursing bad news; but not so for many in China who suffered greatly. A very old bishop told me that the peak moment of his ministry came when a voung sister came to him asking to bless her dream for a contemplative monastery. I asked him why did he say ves to such an enormous challenge in present circumstances. He replied: "I spent 25 years in jail and 10 in solitary confinement, and had nothing else to do but contemplate. I knew what she was talking about!" Out of what would be described as a 'death' situation by many people, for him came a resurrection moment to which he could not have responded with out his

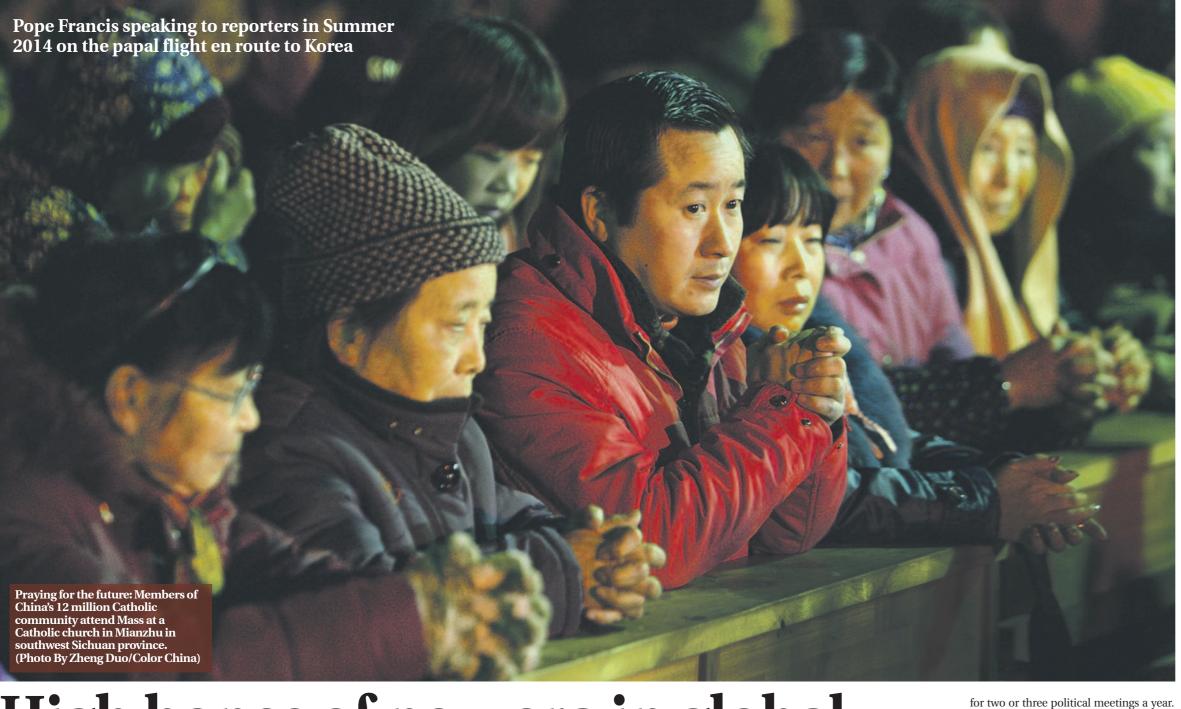
previous experience. Chinese people are no more perfect than we are, but In all the people I have met in China, old and young, the truth of St Paul is manifest, "I live, no not I but Christ lives in me'.

Fr Eammon O'Brien is Director of Cultural Exchange with China (CEC), a voluntary Association from the world wide Catholic tradition whose specific aim is to build bridges between the Catholic Churches of China and of Britain.

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High hopes of new era in global relations as China looks to West

Catholicism in China has a long and complicated history. Christianity has existed in China in various forms since at least the Tang Dynasty in the 8th century AD. Following the 1949 takeover by the Communist Party of China, Catholic and Protestant missionaries were expelled from the country, and Christianity was vilified as a manifestation of western imperialism.

In 1957, the Chinese government established the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, CPCA, which rejected the authority of the Holy See and appointed its own bishops.

However, there are now high hopes we may be entering a new era of more open dialogue with China. Earlier this month Bishop Thomas Zhang Huaixin of Anyang, a fierce opponent of the CPCA, died aged 90 and his replacement, Bishop Joseph Zhang Yinlin, 45, is the first Chinese

Dr Hon was born in Hong Kong on 22nd attempting to redress. obtained a Ph.D. degree in Psychiatry.

Asia, Middle and Eastern Europe. I moved month as I have a lot of business interests here," said Dr Hon.

"Back home, China has developed a lot since the reform in the late 70s and early 80s. Some 720 million people have been lifted out of poverty, and it's still a developing country, especially in the coastal areas. Some of the provinces are richer than others, so it's still an ongoing situation."

Dr Hon says that, as China emerged from poverty, the country followed a policy of rapid development of urban areas, but this created unexpected difficulties and

Vatican since 2012.

western relations generally, *The Universe* CEO Joseph Kelly met up with philanthropist, diplomat and Chinese entrepreneur Dr Johnny Sei-Hoe Hon, who has built up an international conglomerate, with diverse interests ranging over banking, property development, financial services, education, media, entertainment and leisure,

bishop with dual approval from China and the

With China adopting a more open policy to

sports, telecoms, mining and biotechnology. Currently the Ambassador-at-Large for Grenada (and with official positions with four other governments), Johnny is often consulted by presidents, prime ministers and other state leaders who value his advice and insights.

Here he gives *The Universe* his view on progress between China and the West ...

December 1971 to Hon Tak Sun (father) and Wong Ling, Betty (mother), the eldest of two sons. In 1985, he came to the UK where he attended Uppingham School. In 1993, he graduated from King's College London and went to Hughes Hall College at the University of Cambridge where he

"I stayed here for a bit then I worked in back to live in Hong Kong about seven years ago but I still come to the UK once a

"The goal of the Chinese government is that, by 2030, 70 per cent of the population, which is one billion people, will be living in cities. But this has caused a few problems also, where the government has built up families being apart can be avoided. But these cities, but not enough people are living there.

"When China first developed, the population was living mainly in the coastal areas, so workers had to travel long distances to find jobs. In some cases both parents had to leave a child behind with carers, such as grandparents, to head to manufacturing industries, producing goods the city for work. That's why, at certain times of the year, for instance Chinese New Year, there are these huge migrations

of people back to their villages." By building up smaller town near the coast or in the provinces the Chinese government has been hoping that people will find jobs closer to home.

"Of course it's all very well to build up spend money. One of the challenges that housing," says Dr Hon,"but business development takes far longer, as it's sometimes hard to encourage businesses to in- and reliance on well known imported social problems, which the country is now vest in these smaller towns and rural towns goods, so the government has been doing underused because they were only built

- the logistics are harder and transport costs are higher.'

a lot of work trying to build up our own

the entertainment industry, which is a

particular passion of Johhny's. He is an

active investor in media and entertainment

and was recently described as an 'Asian

Media Mogul'. He has acted as executive

projects and has worked with leading di-

rectors such as Oliver Stone, Derek Yee

in the theatre business, acting as the ex-

ecutive producer of Andrew Lloyd Webber's

event in London, so it's now off to Broad-

but in China there are lots and lots of the-

Close in the West End in 2016.

and Gong Ying Tian.

way," says Johnny.

producer for various international film

More recently he has become involved

"Sunset Boulevard has been a sold out

"We plan to do more musicals and some

Nowhere has this been stronger than in

The long term goal of the Chinese government is to build up the countryside, so that many of these problems around it really all depends on whether these smaller towns can attract business for

"It will happen, but it will take time," says Dr Hon. "Over the past 15 years China has been very 'cash rich' so the focus of growth has been centred on developing mainly for export to world markets. Now the government is trying to change things from a manufacturer-based economy to a consumer-driven one. The focus is now far more on providing services and con-

sumer products. "In China we now have a rapidly growing middle class who, simply put, need to of them we will also bring back to China. For London and the US one of the hardest we have in China is fewer well known things is to find theatres, to find the slots, brands, which has led to a demand for atres up and down the country that are

drama, theatre and musicals because they want their children to learn more about things, and moral and social issues, so family-orientated productions are very "The next project is going to be 42nd Street, which has been off the London

scene for nearly 20 years now, so we're just preparing for that with a launch expected early 2017. We're also discussing the rights to My Fair Lady.

"In China the older generation watched things like the Beijing opera, but the younger generation want something more ern productions, and especially for their been buying fewer commodities. Yes, it's

"This year China is already set to surpass the US in box office receipts," he says.

worth 6.1 billion US dollars as opposed to a 'no win' situation – if we buy more re-10 billion dollars in the US. This year in February China finally passed the US box if we buy less they say we're killing the are Church and other groups working office receipts by 250 million dollars. It's growing all the time, and by the end of this year China will become the largest global market for film.

This might come as a surprise to many, who still perceive China as a country with high levels of censorship and state control of the media. "Yes, there is a committee that screens out a lot of unsuitable things, but a lot of foreign movies do get shown,"

"One of the things that's happening now is that many Chinese companies are working with Hollywood studios to produce content that is suitable for the China market. Cenour two countries. It's founded on a basic sorship is not a major thing – most of the major Hollywood movies pass through the system quite easily. Almost all of the American-made blockbusters are shown in China. The emphasis is far more on monitoring social media and the internet."

And the best way for UK businesses to do business with China? "Partner with an like myself who know China well to invest can only be good for the country.

in China. Now it's the opposite way.

"Now the Chinese middle and upper "The big challenge is to help Chinese classes want their children to experience entrepreneurs to invest in the west, so the market is now coming this way.

"Today it's China that has the cash and the markets, but what we perhaps still lack is the international management expertise, innovations and the brands. So it now makes sound sense for Chinese companies to acquire overseas capabilities, brands and innovations, and import them."

Of course, for many in the west, this new economic expansion of China repre sents a threat, especially to resources and raw materials, but Dr. Hon takes a some-

" Actually, one of the problems of the modern and exciting, they really love west- last few years is that China has actually build meaningful relations with China," a major economy, but it's now just one of a number of emerging economies so it's unfair to say China is to blame for world "In 2015 the Chinese box office was prices, or a shortage of resources. It's really sources people say we're driving up prices, market. You just can't win this argument.

"Also, with wages and other issues, the cost of producing goods in the UK is often much more expensive than producing them in third world countries, the background costs are simply higher. People will go where goods are cheaper, and manufacturers will go where the price is most attractive. You can't really lay all the blame

for that on China. Last October President Xi Jinping of China made a state visit to the UK, which Prime Minister David Cameron hailed as "a key moment in the relationship between belief, which President Xi and I share, that a strong relationship is in the interests of both Britain and China."

It's a view that Dr Hon shares strongly. "What the UK government has achieved in the past five years is to make the UK the most popular place for Chinese direct established Chinese business," says Dr dollars worth of investment came from Hon. "You can set up yourself but it takes China to Britain, and following his UK a lot longer. A few decades ago business visit, another £30 billion has been promised with the West was mainly a few big western by the Chinese president to help Chinese companies working closely with people firms to make investments in the UK. That

Bishop committed to healing old divisions

told not to speak to the media.

"He comes from a very traditional

Catholic family," one attendee at the or-

dination said of the new bishop, asking not to be named as the priests had been

"I'm glad he is becoming our bishop.

He has a very deep faith and I know he

will be able to accomplish his ministry

well." The Anyang diocese now has two bishops, 30 priests, 120 nuns and about

40,000 members. A local priest said that

the ordination was a good start for the

Church in Henan and also for the Church

in China."This is a new beginning for

This optimism is hugely welcome, as

the past few years have been difficult for

the Catholic Church in China. The emer-

gence of robust Protestant groups has

seen the state respond wth restrictions

on civil and religious society and the last

ordination of a bishop in China ended in

turmoil, when Shanghai's newly installed

Thaddeus Ma Dagin denounced the CPCA

He has been under effective house arrest

In Zhejiang province a campaign to re-

move crosses from both Protestant and

Catholic churches has been running for

more than a year, with some houses of

worship demolished on the grounds that

However, after intense background talks,

enthusiastically about the consecration

"People look at the UK and say there's a

oper asset protection laws - so the UK

been the favourite place for the Chinese

good legal system, a sense of fair play, and

to make investments. London currently

has the highest trading of the Chinese

"On the top level the UK government is

very keen, but perhaps at the more middle

wary of Chinese money. But it's a free mar-

ket and that's what London is all about.

and the hopes for improving relations with

in terms of wanting to make changes and

the Vatican?

So what of the Catholic Church in China

"I think the current pope is very dynamic

"Relations between the Chinese gov

ernment and the Vatican have improved

greatly in recent years. They still need to

agree on a few things before they can form

official diplomatic relations but I think

we're getting there. More and more there

openly in Hong Kong and China to bring

moral principles and ideas to things like

business studies and economics, and that

terests, Johnny also recognises that capital

needs to be rerouted back into local

people. When I left psychiatry and medicine

and went into business. I always had the

hope that if I could make some money,

then maybe I could do more things than

"So I try to make a difference, and I

take a keen interest in helping developing

countries - I've visited Armenia, South

Sudan and the Caribbean, where I've tried

ically, especially where there are often

creating sustainable projects that can help

people function locally. You have to help

people to become self sufficient and in-

dependent if you want change and im-

provements to last. We all have a duty to

"But it's not just money, it's often about

quite isolated Christian communities.

"I work with lots of groups of young

can only be good for the country."

is to improve in the longer term.

one doctor could do.

they violated building codes.

in a seminary ever since the ceremony.

and was taken away.

Anyang Diocese," the priest said.

When the iconic and heroic Bishop Thomas Zhang Huaixin of Anyang died on 10th May, aged 90, it was entirely natural that he would be succeeded by his coadjutor Bishop, Joseph Zhang

Bishop Yinlin, 45, who had previously been Vicar General of the diocese, had for some months been running affairs due to the declining health of Bishop Huaixin. If his succession is no surprise, his position within the Catholic Church in China gives cause for serious optimism, as he is the first bishop since 2012 to have the dual approval of both the Vatican and the Chinese Patriotic Association.

Ordained as coadjutor bishop of the diocese on 4th August last year, his ordination Mass was concelebrated by around 100 priests, and attended by about 1,400 people, including 120 nuns.

In the liturgy, Coadjutor Bishop Zhang old the congregation that he was very touched and thanked God for choosing nim, a simple and weak servant. He also thanked the ordinary, Bishop Zhang, for nurturing and guiding him patiently for

Born in Henan province in 1971, Bishop oseph Zhang Yinlin studied at the National Seminary in Beijing from 1992-1996. After being ordained to the priesthood in 1996, Fr Zhang served as vicar general, assisting Bishop Thomas Zhang Huaixin.

"In April 2015, he, as the only candidate, was elected as candidate to be coadjutor bishop of Anyang diocese. A priest of Anyang diocese told AsiaNews that the ordination liturgy was "sacred, solemn, peaceful and smooth." He described it as a special day and full of graces."

Unlike previous consecrations, none of the presiding bishops at Zhang's ordination was illicit. Vatican Radio reported optimistically that the bishops at the iturgy were "all Vatican-approved and

China's state officials extended an olive branch to the Holy See last summer by accommodating the Vatican's wishes to consecreate Bishop Zhang in Henan of the Party's rule over all Catholic affairs in the country Chinese have a vivid saying for the sit-

uation of many Christians nowadays: 'Reguo shang de mayi," 熱鍋上的螞蟻 "It's like being ants crawling on a hot wok." But the proverbial wok has clearly been less hot for Catholics over the past 12 months. China's Catholic bloggers wrote



of Bishop Zhang, and the official website of the Party's State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), announced that Bishop Joseph Zhang Yinlin's ordination was a great success and the article included little of the previous rhetoric, which was normally more combative and assertive

maintained a discreet but determined pastoral profile, as he continues to build China's 12 million Catholic community.

fresh encouragement and inspiration, and the real hope that old divisions will heal.

Since his ordination Bishop Zhang has meaningful bridges between the state and For the faithful, his appointment brings

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