
A VISIT TO THE GRAVEYARD AT ZHENGFUSI CHURCH

走訪正福寺堂墓地

DONGFENG CHEN 陈东风

Out of *Xizhimen*, within four kilometers to the west, there were the tombstones in the French Jesuit cemetery. After the tombstones were destroyed, the church in the cemetery was also knocked down. Neither the local Magazine nor the history of the church took any record of these events. So, half a century later, the memories of a few old parishioners who witnessed the fall of the monuments and the collapse of the church have been blurred, and no one could tell the details of the final view of the cemetery and church. All their memories are of childhood under the shade of the orchard trees in the cemetery. From time to time, some historians and heritage experts stand before the renovated *Zhengfusi* church based on the five small rooms on the south side of the ruins. They were silent, shook their heads and turned away, no longer showing any interest in it.

After the first snowfall in the winter of 2011, the old parishioners of *Zhengfusi* church were no longer silent. They used the five rooms

as the basis to fight for the recovery of the cemetery that once belonged to their memory, and to rebuild the cemetery where their fathers' generations were baptized, prayed, confessed, received the Eucharist, got married, and died. I don't know how to put it. Although the cemetery is gone, and so is the Five Rooms Church, a new church has been built in the northeast corner of the cemetery, which is said to be the largest in western Beijing. Now *Zhengfusi* has a church which has been built but is not yet in use. But the *Zhengfusi* Church is gone. No one knows, at least not yet, whether the gain and loss of the former *Zhengfusi* Church has become the end of history. Perhaps, this is the legacy and repentance that the last generation of the *Zhengfusi* Church parishioners will leave to the next generation of parishioners and the church.

After the first snowfall in the winter of 2011, the old parishioners of *Zhengfusi* church were no longer silent. They used the five rooms as the basis to fight for the recovery of the cemetery that once belonged to their memory, and to rebuild the cemetery where their fathers' generations were baptized, prayed, confessed, received the Eucharist, got married, and died.

At noon on the first day of the first month of 2023, a Jesuit came with his friends to the *Zhengfusi* church. The iron gate on the wall of the church was locked. While standing outside the cemetery, outside the church, waiting for the

sunshine of spring, they prayed, "Rest in peace to the ancestors who are buried here and have gone to an unknown place". It was said that "A cold plum stands proudly in the snow and stands

"Rest in peace to the ancestors who are buried here and have gone to an unknown place". It was said that "A cold plum stands proudly in the snow and stands alone in the frosty spring". Please pray and know at the former place of *Zhengfusi* Church that the Jesuits, witnesses of Christ the King and inheritors of the "Ricci Rules", are here!

alone in the frosty spring". Please pray and know at the former place of the *Zhengfusi* Church that the Jesuits, witnesses of Christ the King and inheritors of the "Ricci Rules", are here! The Gospel of Matthew says, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24). This has often given rise to irreconcilable misunderstandings. And from the point of view of Biblical interpretation, it may not have been intended as a condemnation of the rich. Rather, it points out the consequences of a rich man's unrighteous behavior and warns all unrighteous people, including the rich man. It is only the specific identity of the rich man that has been intentionally narrowed down. This judgment-like conclusion sounds comfortable to those who are still far from wealth and have not yet become wealthy, and who once have become rich, may immediately turn around and do not think so.

According to The Koran, “Those who deny My signs and defy them, all the gates of heaven will not be opened for them, and they will not be able to see the truth. They shall not enter Paradise until the cable go through the eye of a needle. This is how I will reward the offender.” Comparing with “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God” in the Gospel, they seem to be similar in the context. “Camel”, “cable”, “eye of the needle”, “paradise”, perhaps these contexts are familiar to the locals. The Gospel and the Koran would naturally invoke them. The Koran is not about identity, it is about goodness. What the Gospel stories refer to is identity as well as good and evil. Therefore, even though they are the same narrative, there is still a difference between the two. In this way, when the Koran and the Bible deal with similar subjects, their subjects may be different. It would be more than theological nonsense, if we were to use this as a reason to heighten their supposed differences from each other.



PROF. DONGFENG CHEN¹, Beijing Jiaotong University

1 Prof. Chen has been doing research on the tombstones of missionaries in Beijing and beyond for several decades. He also been promoting dialogue in various universities between Christianity with Islam.