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FRONTLINE/WORLD GOES INSIDE CHINA'S "UNDERGROUND" CHRISTIAN CHURCH -- PLUS MORE STORIES FROM A SMALL PLANET

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"Jesus in China"

A massive wave of Christianity has been sweeping across China in recent years, and the Chinese ruling party, officially atheist, is now struggling to figure out how to control it. In "Jesus in China," a joint project of FRONTLINE/World and the *Chicago Tribune*, airing Tuesday, June 24, 2008, at 9:00 P.M. ET on PBS (check local listings), reporter Evan Osnos investigates one of the fastest growing Christian populations in the world, and how it could potentially transform China at this explosive moment in the country's development.

Osnos travels first to Henan province, a place known as the "Bethlehem of China," home to China's largest population of Christians. Here, members of an "underground" Christian church tell Osnos that, until recently, they worshipped in caves high above some farmers' fields in Henan to avoid detection by the government. Walking through the weeds and woods where they used to pray, church members publicly describe for the first time the extremes to which they went to conceal their services: "The cave on the left was our Bible classroom. The one on the right was the prayer cave for 5:00 in the morning. The children came here, too."

"This is what it's like when a church is underground," says Zhang Yinan, a historian of Chinese Christianity. Zhang and others say they are coming forward because the government is now signaling a new openness to their faith. But the dangers remain: In an underground "house church," Osnos meets the wife of a well-known Chinese Christian whose husband has been jailed at least five times in recent years. "He was sentenced to seven years in prison the first time," she says of her husband, Zhang Rongliang. "The second time, 11 months. The third time, three years in a labor camp...."

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In the last few years, the Chinese government has arrested hundreds of house church leaders and, in some cases, destroyed the house churches themselves. Still, the Chinese government recognizes that its homegrown Christian movement can no longer simply be branded an instrument of foreign influence and suppressed. Last year in Beijing, the government raised the profile of its “official,” state-controlled Christian Church, opening a multimillion-dollar “megachurch,” complete with coffee bar. A senior member of China’s State Administration of Religious Affairs, Ma Yuhong, tells Osnos that the Party is embracing the religion that it once rejected. “In the old days, there used to be this saying, ‘One more Christian is one less Chinese.’ Nobody says that anymore. ... It’s no longer a foreigner’s religion; it’s now something that belongs to the people.” At the same time, Ma Yuhong makes clear that the government will still closely watch the ever-shifting line between church and state in today’s China. “You can’t make use of religion to interfere in the country’s administration,” Yuhong says. “So if anyone tries to use religion as an excuse to create divisions or to sponsor terrorist activities, that will not be tolerated.”

“Living on the Edge”

For the last year and a half, reporter and producer Martin Smith has been investigating global climate change for *Heat*, a major two-hour FRONTLINE broadcast to air next fall. In “Living on the Edge,” Smith shares some devastating field notes from this looming environmental catastrophe.

Smith begins in the foothills of the Himalayas, where Nepalese farmers are enjoying surprisingly good farming these days thanks to a disturbingly bad new reality: The glaciers of the Himalayas are disappearing faster than ice in any other part of the world. By 2035, scientists tell Smith, 80 percent of the glaciers will have disappeared. World-renowned filmmaker and mountaineer David Breashears helps Smith document the devastation. He shoots the main Rongbuk glacier at the foot of Mount Everest, famously photographed by explorer George Mallory in the early part of the

twentieth century. “I first was on this side of the mountain in 1996,” Breashears tells Smith. “So I know this place well, and to look at the glacier here in 1921, and to look at it out there now in 2007, the glacier’s just gone.” The ripple effect of this change could deal a terrible blow to the hundreds of millions of people currently served by more than 10 major rivers in Asia which will no longer be fed by meltwater from Himalayan glaciers.

In northwestern Kenya, near the Sudanese border, Smith finds the Turkana tribespeople dealing with more frequent droughts, and this, in turn, has led to more tribal fighting over scarce resources. One tribeswoman tells Smith: “There used to be much less fighting among our communities, even here in Turkana, and around the world. There is a lot of blood being spilled. I blame the fights, all these global wars on the weather changes.” Professor Jeffrey Sachs, director of Columbia University’s Earth Institute, says the effects of this long-term decline in rainfall in this part of the world has been devastating. “They’ve contributed to the massive conflicts in Darfur. They’ve contributed to the instability in Somalia. They become security threats for the world, in fact, as well as devastating shocks to these societies themselves.”

Finally, on Namibia’s Skeleton Coast, Smith finds one of the richest sardine fishing grounds in the world practically drying up. Though some blame overfishing and poor management of the coastal waters, others think the failing fishing industry here is the result of rapidly warming oceans. “It is very unlikely that global warming is the only cause of a lot of things that we’re seeing,” climate scientist Joe Romm tells Smith. “But you get the combination of the temperature change which makes things less hospitable, and then you have the overfishing, so you cross a threshold and you get a collapse. And unfortunately, once you’ve changed the climate, it becomes very hard to un-collapse. ... It may be that some of these changes are irreversible.”

“Design Like You Give a Damn”

In the aftermath of 2004’s devastating Indian Ocean tsunami, FRONTLINE/World reporter Singeli Agnew discovers a new movement of architects looking to help solve humanitarian problems through innovative design. “It was very devastating to hear about the tsunami when it happened,” architect Purnima McCutcheon tells Agnew. “Most of my career I had been doing large commercial projects and shopping centers. It had always been my aspiration to at some point work with a community and do something more personally meaningful.”

This is where Cameron Sinclair and Kate Stohr come in. The founders of a nonprofit group called Architecture for Humanity, they help link local communities in need with a network of architects excited at the chance to help. Their motto is “Design like you give a damn,” and they emphasize that the goal is not to produce trophy buildings so much as to create sustainable communities. “For 90 percent of the world, it’s a matter of survival,” he says. “It’s life or death. If you’re not sustainable, then you’re embedding maintenance into a community that can actually cause great detriment.” Throughout the world, Architecture for Humanity has designed and helped raise money to build hundreds of projects, and to develop an open source library of innovative design ideas for a clientele that often lives on less than a dollar a day. In the area hard hit by the 2004 tsunami alone, Sinclair and architect McCutcheon successfully built 12 different projects, including several new community centers. “If there wasn’t an architect involved, it probably wouldn’t have got done,” says Sinclair. “It’s not about the design that the architect brings; it’s about bringing the community together and really kind of visualizing what their dreams and what their needs are to kind of create solutions.”

Stephen Talbot is series editor, Ken Dornstein is senior producer, and Sharon Tiller is series executive director for FRONTLINE/World. FRONTLINE/World is produced by WGBH Boston and is broadcast nationwide on PBS. Major funding for FRONTLINE/World is provided by Shell, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Skoll Foundation through a grant to the PBS Foundation, and by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. FRONTLINE/World is closed-captioned for deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers

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