

MODERNIZATION & THE BEIJING STUDENT MOVEMENT

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The dramatic and tragic events of June 4 which riveted the world's attention on Tiananmen Square as the People's Liberation Army crushed with brutal force and mindless slaughter the peaceful demonstration by students appealing for democratic reform was another bloody chapter in China's long and painful struggle to attain modernization. The problem of modernization has dominated Chinese history for the past one hundred years. Beginning with the reform movements during the reigns of the Tongzhi and Guangxu emperors, continuing through the establishment of the Republic of China and the May Fourth movement, up to the founding of the Peoples Republic with its subsequent Four Modernizations policy, and now with the Beijing student movement for democratic reforms, the modernization process in China has passed through many phases and gone down many different paths. It is to be noted that Chinese intellectuals have always played the leading roles.

It was Premier Zhou Enlai who first coined the phrase 'the four modernizations' in his report to the 3rd National People's Congress on December 20, 1964 when he singled out agriculture, industry, science/technology and military defence as the major areas of national concern. He emphasized China's need to modernize in these four areas again on January 13, 1975 at the 4th Congress. Later, it was to be Deng Xiaoping who promoted them as the central element of a new government policy. The four modernizations were vital in the post-cultural revolution years if China was to reverse its backward slide into economic chaos. Nor were they meant to be palliatives - first aid measures - to ameliorate a chronic condition. As part of the policy and supplementing it, China opened its doors to international investment and began importing modern technology on a massive scale. The problem was, however, that the four modernizations could only be one part of the process leading towards China's modernization.

It was the English historian A.J. Toynbee who pointed out years ago that modernization is a process of continual development; one that passes through three distinct stages. What begins on the merely technological level, soon moves on to a social, and quite rapidly an ideological and spiritual level. Toynbee's explanation is quite comprehensive. Human life is lived on more than the material and social

levels. It includes the ideological and spiritual as well. One cannot open the door to modern technology without getting a flood of innovative ideas regarding social, intellectual and spiritual development in the bargain. The majority of Chinese have now realized that there can be no turning back to an outdated system wherein the individual feels victimized and shackled. Without a parallel modernization in the social system allowing for greater freedom of thought and expression, even the materialist and technological modernization will not be complete. After ten years of a relatively open door situation, the difficult problems China continues to face are now being met with more demands for political and social reforms, and with increasingly insistent calls for more democratic freedom. Nor are these demands any longer isolated incidents, but rather part of a growing trend, whose effects are being felt not only in China but in its neighbouring countries as well.

When 11 years ago the "Democracy Wall" was erected in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, it openly declared that democracy was the "fifth-modernization". Contributors to the wall posters warned then that unless the political system was included in the modernization process, the inner hunger of the people's hearts would never be satisfied.

While Christianity does not teach any particular form of social system as the ideal, it does strongly affirm the practical values of human freedom and the inalienable rights of each individual person. Christianity teaches that human rights are a gift of God, and that each individual in society has the right to pursue freedom. The incarnation of Christ radically frees people from whatever negative force binds them in fear. This liberation pertains not only to the bondage of personal sin but also to the chains of social injustice. A Christian, by entering the Church, commits himself to participation in the saving ministry of Christ, which is essentially to restore mankind to authentic and complete freedom.

No matter what happens in the short term to the present Beijing student movement, one fact remains evident: the trend of human history and culture is pointing in the direction of a more comprehensive and inclusive "modernization", one that seeks realization through democratic forms. At the same time, the Beijing student movement arouses Christians everywhere to a more active commitment to and participation in the liberating mission of Christ to achieve complete freedom for all of humanity. Besides praying for the dead and wounded, with sadness turned into strength, we must cause the spirit of freedom and democracy striven for by the students to soon make its appearance and bear fruit in the motherland.