

Editorial

Document on Education and Religious Activities

On August 5, 1991, the China State Education Commission (SEC) issued a document which deals with education in its relation to religious activities. The document is entitled, "Notice on the Prevention of Some Places Using Religious Activities to Hinder School Education" and was widely circulated to education commissions, educational bureaus of each province, autonomous regions and municipalities and colleges under the SEC. We reproduce the document in Tripod (p. 17) to show the relationship between religion and education in China today.

This document expresses grave concern about "the phenomenon of religion interfering with and opposing education..." It lists and comments on 7 major avenues of "infiltration and opposition" in education: 1) recruitment of believers among students; 2) propagation of religious ideology; 3) establishment of illegal schools; 4) religious propaganda by foreign teachers; 5) overseas religious broadcasting; 6) unapproved funding for projects with religious overtones; and 7) enticement of young people to study abroad in religious institutions.

While the document stresses that the problem is neither extensive nor has it reached grave proportions anywhere, it is nonetheless insistent that remedies be applied immediately to halt the further "infiltration" of religion within the educational process. It offers 8 measures to achieve this: 1) uphold the separation of religion from education; 2) strengthen the Marxist view of religion and scientific thinking; 3) tighten the examination, approval and management of religious schools; 4) strengthen the education and administration of teachers; 5) forbid associations and individuals to act as agents for international organizations for the recruitment of students to study abroad; 6) require that all donations from outside organizations and individuals be examined and approved by the government; 7) arouse patriotic believers among ethnic groups to raise funds for education and mobilize young people to enter school and 8) seriously implement the party's policy regarding religion and education.

The document appears to be a reaction of fear. China today

finds itself on the horns of a dilemma. In order to promote the Four Modernizations China must maintain its open door policy. At the same time it senses the need to resist the influences of ideologies foreign to its Marxist view of religion and science. China is also well aware that it is facing many and serious problems: political unrest, world-wide criticism for certain business and social practices, a breakdown in traditional belief, in moral education and of confidence in the efficacy of its social system. All these elements have become grounds for fear.

The present concern would seem to be that religion is reaching an audience of young people resulting in a growing number of young believers. In a country that has mandated and rewarded atheism, that has seriously insisted that persons under the age of 18 should not be exposed to religion, that "the basic task of a school is to cultivate constructors and successors of socialism..." the fact that a survey (though not widely conducted) should reveal that a goodly number of students believe God created the world and that 73.76% of young believers are primary school students has become cause for alarm.

From our point of view fears regarding religion and education are groundless. Today mainline church believers are not fanatics out to coerce young people to convert to Christianity. Rather, students are welcome to investigate freely the Gospel message of their own accord.

Religious people today are intent on the development of the whole person, and to help young people become completely human. We think the best way to do this and to bring about the full realization of China's own desire to give its young people "a correct outlook on life and a proper world view" is to provide the type of education that deals with people's physical, moral, spiritual and psychological development. Such an education would teach students to respect the dignity of the human person, the freedom of belief of others and enable them, in a free response to truth, to make truly human choices. From this type of education no country has anything to fear.

In its eagerness to control religious activities is China not perhaps defeating its own desires and purposes? There is in human nature a certain idiosyncrasy: anything forbidden or excessively controlled, often becomes all the more tempting and attractive. It is quite possible that strictures on religion and religious activities would, in the end, work in favor of religion.