

From the Editor

Ten years ago the Sixth Plenum of the Twelfth Central Committee of the CPC had as its main topic “The Construction of a Spiritual Civilization.” Now the Sixth Plenum of the Fourteenth Central Committee has just spent four days discussing the same topic. The major portion of the January-February 1996 issue of *Tripod* was also devoted to spiritual civilization. Because the topic is once again getting top billing in Chinese newspapers and magazines we feel compelled to mention the subject once again in *Tripod’s* editorial in this last issue for 1996.

Any government that finds it necessary to discuss the same topic for ten consecutive years, must certainly be concerned with the matter. It is obvious from the intensity and extent of the discussions on promoting socialist ethics and cultural progress that China feels progress in building up spiritual civilization is moving too slowly. It is not keeping pace with its economic development. A balance must take place between the two.

It is also clear, of course, that China’s openness to the world has been a mixed bag. It has brought in things both good and bad. Among the bad, China observes are bourgeois liberalism, a softening towards Marxist ideology and a decline in ethical practices. It excoriates the pursuit of material comfort and money worship, corruption and a host of social evils. Among the good is a considerable improvement in living standards, tremendous economic progress and development. The problem now is to maximize the good and eradicate the bad. Given the nature of the ordinary human being, especially one whose behaviour has been under strict control for years, the trick is not only to strike a balance between social progress and social ethical behaviour, but to realize the campaign’s utopian dream of creating a “new” person, the selfless patriot, the noble-minded citizen living socialist spiritual values within a socialist collective society.

China hopes to solve its spiritual problem through law and education. Part of the education process so far has included the “Strike hard campaign” launched in April 1996. This campaign, has

already yielded results: the execution of several thousand persons during the course of the year.

Obviously, this all out morality campaign is more than an all out effort to save the people from the effects of fallen human nature; it is also and principally to save the Party. It is meant essentially for the cadres "to revive their drooping spirits" towards Marxism. It is an effort to rebuild a waning faith in socialism, to put the brakes on the need to succeed at any cost, and to foster a spirituality with Chinese characteristics devoid of Western influence.

There is a strong desire throughout the whole world to see China build a new and better society. Some may find China's utopian dream a throwback to Mao's day, a concept that backfired very badly. Still China, like the rest of the world's societies, seems to realize that to be a dignified and meritorious competitor on the world stage it must improve both its international image and its image and behaviour at home. The Chinese leadership is playing against lopsided odds. It wants to create the perfect person, using an iron fist to change the course of human nature. Can it succeed?

This issue of Tripod features as its lead article Jack Clancey's theological reflection on Yin and Yang as related to human rights and an update on the situation of religious freedom in the nineties by the Holy Spirit's senior researcher Anthony Lam. We also complete Susan Goodman's article on Chinese beliefs and rites in the review's culture section.

The documentation section features two important communications from China's underground church sector. Both are pleas for tolerance and fidelity.

Since we are now in the Christmas season, we have included two articles related to this holy season, one by Michael Sloboda on "Christmas in China," and another by Peter Lee, a creative interpretation of the story of the Magi,

The news section is a basic review of the most important news items related to the Church and religion in China in 1996.