

Editorial

For China, 1999 is a year of at least three very important anniversaries. They are the 80th anniversary of the May 4th Movement, (May 4, 1919), the 10th anniversary of the Tiananmen Massacre, (June 4, 1989), and the 50th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic (October 1, 1949). Two of these anniversaries are already behind us, but it is not quite accurate to say that China actually celebrated them.

On May, 1919, the young people from Peking University led student demonstrations to protest the Chinese government's compliance with the policies of foreign powers that brought humiliation on China. The students asked for progress in science and democracy as indispensable elements for building up the new China. During this movement students, especially those of the University of Peking, the leading institute of higher learning in the country, assumed the role of being the country's critical conscience and the patriotic vanguard of the people. The communist regime recognized the movement's patriotism, in which a number of its own leaders took part. As a result, the Chinese government considers the May 4th Movement to be politically correct. However, it has consistently overlooked the plea for democracy demanded in 1919, and stressed instead the need for science for the progress of the nation.

In May and June 1989, the students, again acting as the nation's conscience, took to the streets asking for democracy and an end to corruption. The government's reaction was seen live all over the world on television. As the 10th anniversary of the June 4th incident approached this year, the government started major renovations in Tiananmen Square making it nearly impossible for any group to gather there. It flooded the square with PLA soldiers as well as hundreds of plain-clothes policemen. It increased activities and meetings among the students to keep them occupied and away from the streets, and exerted additional control over the media. In addition it arrested or placed strict surveillance over all dissenters, tightened existing controls and increased repression.

An unforeseen event which worked in China's favor at this tense time was the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade on

May 7. This tragic incident gave students a chance to vent their feelings after 10 years of suppression and served to distract their attention from the Tiananmen massacre. It helped channel their revolutionary spirit into a patriotic cause which was favorable to the government. Needless to say, there was no real commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the Tiananmen event in Mainland China.

This issue of *Tripod* deals with the relationship between science and religion, as expressed by Li Shen, a fervent Marxist and a commentary on his article by an equally fervent Christian, Rene Gilbert.

In “The Way of Non-Direction: Insights on Spiritual Direction from the *Tao Te Ching*,” the eminent spiritual director, John R. Mabry, reminds us that traditions not usually associated with Christianity might have something to offer to Christian spiritual directors. In this article, he explores certain aspects of Taoism that he sees as very helpful to the director and for the directees.

In their critique of Gianni Criveller’s book, *Preaching Christ in Late Ming China*, two Chinese scholars arrive at an insight seldom expressed by Chinese commentators on the works of missionaries in China. They say, “He [Aleni] only influenced the people around him through acts of love. Because his love was from Christ, many people from the lower social classes were impressed by his love and converted to Christianity. Out of love, he also held friendly, open and sincere conversations with the literati.” And later they remark, “In our view, the most important reason for the Jesuit breakthrough in China was not dependence on their theories, but because they brought with them the good news of Christ’s love, and everything they did in China was imbued with this love.” It would be difficult to find a more beautiful tribute to any missionary enterprise, even among those written by the most ardent admirer of missionaries anywhere in the world.

Other features of this issue include several important documents. One deals with regulations issued by the State Council on social organizations operating schools in China. Another concerns the new religious regulations issued by the Religious Affairs Bureau for Jilin Province. In addition we have included the major changes made in the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China during the Ninth National People’s Congress in March 1999. (BAM)