

Chronicle

A Change in the Chinese Understanding of "Religion"?

The new understanding of religion, if such it be, is specially associated with the name of Zhao Fusan. Zhao is a deputy Chairman of the Protestant Three-self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), and for some years has been the Deputy Director of the Institute for the Study of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (a state body). He is therefore to be regarded as a philosopher as well as a theologian. His membership of the Standing Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference shows that he has a distinct political function. As an excellent English speaker, he is prominent in the small group of those who frequently travel abroad and thus help to shape the image of the TSPM in foreign lands.

As a result, no doubt, of reflecting about what should be meant by "socialist spiritual culture" Zhao issued in August 1985 a statement with the title "Religion, Spiritual Culture and National Unity". Zhao's argument may be summarised as follows:

When a nation sets out to reshape its spiritual culture, there must be a serious attempt to distinguish the positive features from the negative ones, which must be rigorously rejected, while the historical and cultural heritage is something that must be preserved. Zhao challenges those communists who, claiming to be orthodox followers of Marx, regard all religion as a tool of government used by the exploiting class, an opium which poisons the people, an obstacle to the people's understanding. In accordance with their views religion should be totally discarded, and "socialist spiritual

culture" built on new, secular, foundations. Zhao does not deny that religion may have an opium-like quality, or that it has at times been used as a weapon by the exploiting class, but he maintains that the scientific study of history contradicts such a negative outlook. He cites a long list of cultural achievements from China, India and the West — literary, artistic, architectural and musical — and challenges those of his rivals who regard such things as nothing but opium. He suggests that when the "opium" school of thought recommends the restoration of Buddhist temples and the preservation of religious relics, they contradict their own principles. Zhao maintains that the religious heritage should be preserved for its own sake.

Zhao supports Deng Xiaoping in his definition of "socialist spiritual culture": it embraces ideals, conduct, civilisation and discipline, and these things can be accepted by followers of *all* religions. Socialist ethics and morality, he argues, are in line with the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, the teachings of the Koran, and the Five Principles of the Buddha. The religious heritage should therefore be conscientiously upheld, and this will reinforce the dictates of the party. It will strengthen unity among the people; it will serve the cause of friendly and peaceful relations with other nations, and encourage citizens to follow the Four Modernisations (the modernisation of science and technology, defence, agriculture and industry — *Ed.*).

Zhao's outlook has been given a fair amount of publicity since the autumn of

1985. It does not yet, however, appear to have been given the status of party orthodoxy. An article which appeared earlier in 1985 in *Guangming Ribao* (the daily paper in Guangming) emphasises the view of the so-called "leftists", representing the other end of the Chinese political spectrum:

In the socialist society, although certain changes have taken place in the form and content of religion, its nature as a drug for the people has not changed. The main evidence for this is that the traditional ideas of religion (such as "Heaven", "Hell", and "Samsara" [transmigration of souls —

Ed.) have remained unchanged. Without these religion cannot be called religion This is entirely different from the communist world outlook

It is necessary to unite with the broad masses of religious believers, so that they can make concerted efforts with us to accelerate the construction of the four modernisations A society without God will surely come.

There are, however, clear signs that Zhao's views are gaining ground at the expense of the "leftists".

ARVAN GORDON

Bibles and New Testaments Printed in China

During 1986 more than 250,000 Chinese New Testaments and half a million complete Chinese Bibles will have been printed in the People's Republic of China on paper supplied by the United Bible Societies. Hymnbooks and other literature will also be printed.

The actual work of printing and distribution is in the hands of the Amity Foundation (a non-government and non-church organisation devoted to various aspects of social service). The general secretary of the Amity Foundation, Mr Han Wenzao (a prominent Protestant leader) writes:

The aims of the foundation are to contribute to China's social development and efforts towards modernisation, to make Christian involvement and participation more widely known to the Chinese people, and to serve as a channel for the international sharing of resources and people-to-people relationships.

The venture involves an agreement between the Amity Foundation and Nanjing Normal University; the latter will provide

the premises for the new printing press on which the work is to be carried out. It is hoped that the new supply of Scriptures will go some way towards satisfying the immense need among Christians in the People's Republic. An appeal for 6.7 million US dollars has been launched by the United Bible Societies to finance the necessary equipment.

During 1985 more than 60,000 Chinese New Testaments and 100,000 Chinese Bibles were printed on paper supplied by the United Bible Societies. The one hundred tons of thin Bible paper made possible the early delivery of Bibles of better quality than had earlier been obtainable. Mr Han Wenzao expressed his thanks, saying, "Owing to the good quality of the paper, these Bibles are thinner and more handy."

It should be emphasised, all the same, that the printing of Bibles and other religious literature represents no more than a minor aspect of the work of the Amity Foundation. The Foundation's main purpose is seen as the general social betterment of the Chinese people.

ARVAN GORDON

New Leaders for the Protestant Church in the GDR

On 2 February 1986 Dr Werner Leich, Bishop of Thuringia, was elected as the new

Chairman of the Conference of Protestant Church leaderships. He succeeds Dr Johan-