

CULTS IN CHINA

No Shortage of Saviors

by Paul Carden

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*"To the famished man
every bitter thing is sweet."
Proverbs 27:7b*

Cultism is a disease — a spiritual disease. One among many, to be sure, but one seldom diagnosed properly or treated adequately.

Just as a lack of nutrition and hygiene lead to disease, cultism flourishes in the absence of truth and hope.

Perhaps nowhere is this spiritual desperation as starkly evident as in China, home to one quarter of the world's population, where a half-century of communist ideology is unraveling — leading to what the September 26 *Washington Post* describes as the nation's "frenzied search for new rules to live by":

Across China, people are struggling to redefine notions of success and failure, right and wrong, good and evil. The quest for something to believe in has become so universal and profound that it is one of the unifying characteristics of life in China today.

Wang Meng, one of China's most famous writers, lamented not long ago that "Morality has perished, but everybody wants to have faith." And legions of false apostles and deceitful workers (2 Cor. 11:13) are prepared to promise anything to snare followers. As the *Post's* Foreign Service reported on July 23, "Manned by an army of the dispossessed and led by alienated government workers, scam artists and self-described visionaries, religious organizations have spread across China, popping up in almost every county, every town." And they can be stunning in their crudeness and brutality. For example, a report in the October 17 *Women's Daily* told how Wu Jifa, a poor farmer in southwest China's impoverished Guizhou province, joined a religious cult in 1997 with dreams of getting rich:

According to the report, the cult's leader, a man surnamed Long, claimed people could leave behind the woes and cares of the world if they stood naked by a road with their identification papers on the ground, and killed the first person who came along to check the papers.

On June 29, 1998, Wu, his wife Long Zaihua, his cousin Wu Qiugou and the cousin's two sons went to a roadside at dawn, took off their clothes and put their papers on the ground. They grabbed the first farmer who approached, forced him to look at the papers and then stoned him to death, the report said.

The tragic story of another self-proclaimed savior, Liu Jiaguo, is recounted

in the enclosed article from the *New York Times*. Notably absent from the *Times* account is Liu's cynical twisting of Scripture. The Associated Press explains that the "Supreme Deity" and his cohorts "told women followers that they must sacrifice their bodies to God, saying that members of their families would get sick and die if they did not have sex with them....Liu and others seduced girls by quoting the Bible out of context, claiming that they were 'predestined in a former life to be called by God to be 'holy spirits,' which would improve their karma.'" Other "Christian" counterfeits are proliferating — and prospering — in China: Last year Open Doors exposed the work of Bible-quoting "Brother Chen," who callously preyed on impoverished and untaught house church members in Hubei province, wiping out their meager savings and their fellowship through his deceptive doctrines. In September the Associated Press disclosed that "Police in southern China's Guangdong province...arrested 31 people and demolished three churches in a campaign to crush a Protestant sect [sic] known as the 'cold water religion.'" This cult was allegedly founded by a:

farm woman, since deceased, who claimed that cold water was the "invincible" blood of the "Heavenly Father." In recent years, it has gained a following of several hundred people, despite attempts by local authorities to close down their churches. Followers, mostly illiterate and semi-illiterate farm women, elderly and disabled people, claim that drinking cold water will cure all illnesses....[The report also] said authorities blamed the sect for causing the deaths of five people, including two young girls, who did not get medical treatment because of their beliefs. Families were broken up and left destitute because of poor harvests after believers substituted cold water for fertilizer and pesticides.

Such cases, long suppressed by officials, are now being brought to light as Beijing struggles to put a lid on Falun Gong and lesser-known spiritual movements that pose a threat to its authority. Conservative estimates place the number of Falun Gong adherents at ten million, and the Washington Post repeats the Chinese government's claim that "Since 1996, in Hunan province alone, authorities have disbanded 10,000 sects and imprisoned at least 10,000 leaders." Even assuming that many of those affected by the government's crackdown are sincere Christians unjustly persecuted for assembling in unofficial churches, cultism appears to be spreading on a scale that defies comprehension. Pray for China!

China seems remote, doesn't it? Sadly, there are few places where cultic diseases cannot reach. In Uganda, authorities are attempting to stop the World Message Last Warning Church (also known as the Doctrine of Brotherhood), a doomsday sect whose members have been charged with defilement of minor girls, rape, theft, kidnapping, and "illegal confinement." According to the Associated Press, leader Wilson Bushara began attracting crowds of followers from as far away as Burundi, Tanzania, and Congo this year "by offering them space in heaven upon death in return for cash payment." At least 24 corpses were discovered in shallow graves in the cult's compound this month. And in the Comoro Islands (an Islamic nation off the east coast of Africa so strict that even the JESUS Film is banned), Jehovah's Witnesses have reportedly gained 100 disciples in just two years.

The sickness can spread so easily — even among committed Christians who haven't been "immunized." Alan Scholes, a professor at the International School of Theology, recently returned from Central Asia, where he gave intensive training to leaders from that predominantly Muslim region. He writes of his encounter with a Christian national, on the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ, who is responsible for supervising all the JESUS Film Project evangelism teams in his former Soviet republic:

He came to me concerned about his friend, whom I'll call Alexe (not his real name). Alexe is the head of the most successful JESUS Film team in the country. But a few years ago he began attending a house church where he learned some strange teachings. Eventually he encouraged all the other members of his team to attend as well. As I heard the description of this group, I recognized it as an American-based cult which denies the Trinity (among other errors).

Another friend of ours, recently returned from a short-term mission in Nepal, describes his amazement upon discovering that his host — a brave pastor/evangelist who frees families from generations of indentured servitude — must help new Christians in that Buddhist land to resist the aggressive tactics of the notorious Boston Movement and Jehovah's Witnesses! In the last several weeks we've also been contacted by a believer in India seeking assistance with the Local Church sect and a Christian in Ethiopia who is responding to the divisive errors of the "Jesus Only" (or "Oneness") Pentecostals in his country.

No matter where the sickness strikes, the antidote for deception is discernment!

And no matter what the culture, discernment depends on data — both from God's precious Word and from a familiarity with the methods and message of cults that exploit the longings of the lost and the confusion of vulnerable Christians. That's why I'm so committed to the cause of the Centers for Apologetics Research — and why we covet your intercession for our efforts to equip believers in Eurasia, Latin America, and beyond. 🌐



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CFAR equips God's people across borders and cultures for discernment, the defense of the faith, and cult evangelism. To learn how you can help, call CFAR at (949) 496-2000 or visit our web site at www.TheCenters.org.