

Tibet's Buddhists Look for Inner Strength

Why has the fate of the mysterious and once-forbidden kingdom of Tibet found such a deep echo in the world? I believe that there is only one answer: it symbolizes the bastion of Eastern spirituality.

In North America many young people thirty years and younger are drawn to Oriental religions that explore inner spiritual resources through meditative techniques.

World attention has been focused on the possible return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet after 22 years of self-imposed exile. The post-Mao spirit of modernization has also affected the relationship between Peking and the Dalai Lama. For a while it seemed that he would return to his Chinese-ruled homeland. Last year (1980) when a visiting overseas Tibetan delegation sparked pro-Dalai Lama demonstrations in Lhasa, Tibet's capital city, irate Chinese officials told their guests to get packing.

In retaliation, the Dalai Lama's "cabinet" in Dharamsala, northern India, announced that detente would end and the Tibetan struggle for "freedom" resumed. *Asia Week* magazine reports that two factors are behind the Dalai Lama's sudden change of heart. The outspoken Tibetan Youth Congress, for one, has apparently succeeded in pressuring the Dalai Lama to keep his distance from Peking.

"The Chinese," pronounced a recent TYC statement, "are trying to entice and lure Tibetans to return as if the Tibetan problem were merely an internal squabble." Also, the Indian Premier Indira Gandhi is said to have made clear during a meeting with the Dalai Lama that any further rapprochement moves must take Delhi's interests into consideration and not cause India embarrassment.

Tensin Gyatso is the fourteenth Dalai Lama. At the age of two, following a nation-wide search, he was declared to be the reincarnation of his predecessor. The Dalai Lama is not just a spiritual leader or a holy man, but a deity.

Maclean's asked him in an interview: "Only a few people in history have been considered, in one way or another, divine. Is the role a burden or a delight?" The Dalai Lama replied: It is very helpful. Through this role I can be of great benefit to people. For this reason I like it; I'm at home with it. It's clear that it is very helpful to people and that I have the karmic relationship to be in this role. Also, it is clear that there is a karmic relationship with the Tibetan people in particular."

The Tibetans are mired in traditions that are not just different, but grotesque by our standards. Their funeral rites are a case in point. Tibetan Buddhist teaching prohibits the digging of graves. They prefer exposure as an act of charity towards hungry animals and birds. In the Lhasa valley the custom is "heavenly burial." The dead are taken to a high mountain where professional undertakers cut up bodies, and give them to eat -

morsel by morsel - to the carrion birds; particularly a kind of bearded vulture, which abounds in that valley.

Hermits, after having performed a pilgrimage, may spend the rest of their time, preaching, teaching, meditating, and pursuing various religious duties.

They will also heal the sick. Healing is mainly done through the powers of the spirit, either by performing special rites and the laying on of hands, or by the preparation of healing potions or consecrated pills. Lama Anagarika Govinda says: "Healing powers are ascribed to all religious functions, and, therefore, the more saintly a man, the greater is his capacity to heal or to endow consecrated objects with beneficent forces." Nowhere is the difference between Buddhism and Christianity more clearly seen than in prayer. A Buddhist doesn't pray to a person or to a power outside himself. He calls upon the forces that dwell within himself.

Tibet never had many Christian missionaries who spread the message of salvation. Only a few have managed to enter this hidden kingdom of spiritual darkness. The British missionary Geoffrey T. Bull was one of them. In his *Tibetan Tales* he relates the story of the conversion of his language teacher. After this man had received Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour and Lord, he returned home and destroyed his idols. Geoffrey Bull comments: "The proud buddhas and ferocious gods of the temple could hold him no more. He had come to Jesus."

We read about new and exciting opportunities for the Gospel in China. Will the Gospel ever come to penetrate Tibet? Let us pray that it will. All things are possible for our God.

Johan D. Tangelder
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