

China's Most Evil Cult

Eastern Lightning has set out to destroy the key leadership of China's Christians.

Late last April, Internet sites reporting on China's Christians were abuzz with a deeply disturbing story: 34 of the top leaders of one of the largest house-church networks in China, the China Gospel Fellowship (CGF), had been mysteriously kidnapped by a vicious Chinese cult group, Eastern Lightning (EL). No one knew where they were being held or what was happening to them.

To those who have followed closely China's Christian developments over the years, the news wasn't just disturbing, it was terrifying. The EL cult is by far the most violent in a long roster of Chinese cults that have arisen over the years. The CGF has long been considered one of the most vibrant of China's house-church groups.

Through history, China has been riven by social upheavals originating with strange religious sects. After Protestant missionaries began to impact China with the gospel in the 19th century, in mid-century a Chinese claiming to be the younger brother of Jesus led a rebellion, called the Taipings, which caused the deaths of 20 million people.

Another uprising, the Boxers, in 1900 claimed the lives of some 30,000 Chinese and Western Christians. Boxer rebels believed they were invulnerable after engaging in mass spirit-possession.

EL claims to want to convert the whole world to its views. Along the way, it has set out to destroy the key leadership of

China's evangelical and charismatic Christians.

The EL doctrine asserts that there are three distinct periods in history in which God has appeared to humans: the Old Testament, when He was called Jehovah; the New Testament, when He "created" Jesus; and today's era, when He has supposedly returned to earth "as lightning from the east" (see Matt. 24:27).

This time, EL asserts, it is in the form of a middle-aged woman in Henan province. The EL rejects the Bible even while quoting from it, claiming that only those who follow EL's teachings will escape divine judgment.

If a lunatic cosmology were EL's only problem, China's Christians wouldn't have much to worry about. But for half a decade, at least, the group has taken to brutal coercion to get "converts."

Kidnapping, beating, torturing, poisoning, bribing, sexually compromising, even killing key Christian leaders has become standard EL practice. The CGF leaders were deceived into attending a meeting where they supposedly were to meet key Christian teachers who had flown in from Singapore.

On arrival at the designated meeting point, the leaders were divided into groups, deprived of their cell phones and shoes, and locked in apartments and houses.

"I realized immediately it was the EL," one of the recently released leaders told me. "I wanted to fight my way out, but I was concerned about the safety of two of the sisters I would be leaving behind." When two other women and two men did

escape, all raised the alarm.

The leader I spoke with was held for 20 days. A poisonous substance initially was put in his water, causing him intense stomach pains and completely disorienting him.

Then began the brainwashing about EL's doctrines. Efforts were made to break his resistance by sending to him for "counseling" a very pretty young woman determined to seduce him. In this leader's case, and miraculously with all 33 other CGF leaders, the relentless psychological and physical assaults were resisted.

In the case of the CGF kidnappings, China's Public Security Bureau, which often suppresses genuine evangelical groups on the spurious grounds that they are cults, agreed to help track down the EL kidnapping locations. In return, the CGF agreed to share with the police any information they had on EL activities.

Despite these terrible events, CGF's leadership is far from downcast today. "This event seems like a tragedy," said one, "but I see it as a kingdom blessing from God."

He said the attack on the movement had stirred up such unity in prayer that a revival had broken out in much of the church. That is deeply encouraging, but much more prayer is needed on behalf of China's Christians before the EL threat is eliminated.

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