

## 《评招远血案：真正的宗教为人民着想》

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宗教各有各的不同，但是它们有一个共同点：尊重生命。

Religions may differ from each other in many ways, but they have one thing in common: respect for life. That also distinguishes religion from evil cults, which challenge social norms and inflict damage upon human life, dignity and liberty. By placing their misguided tenets above everything else, such cults not only break laws, but also offend religions.

The May 28 tragedy in Zhaoyuan, Shandong province, in which six members of the "Church of Almighty God" beat a woman to death because she refused to join their order, is a typical case of cult killing. After being arrested, Zhang Lidong, one of the suspects, said the victim refused to join them so "she is demon and deserves to be killed", reflecting the anti-human trait of cults of terminating anybody who refuses to follow their path. Using violence against non-believers has been the common practice among cults.

An estimated 14 cult organizations, including the "Church of Almighty God", are operating across China. Until the 1980s, such organizations used to be active only in China's western provinces. But in the 1990s, they started infiltrating big cities, and by the turn of the century some of them had even established contacts with brotherly organizations abroad. Other countries, too, have their share of cults; for example, Japan has the Aum Doomsday Cult and the US, the People's Temple, both of which have been involved in killings.

A true believer follows the tenets of his religion without violating the law or social norms. And if a believer breaks the law in the name of religion, he/she deserves to be punished like any other criminal.

On Oct 8, 1999, the Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate jointly published a document describing cults as illegal organizations because they are established in the name of religion to control their followers with lies and are thus detrimental to society.

Cults are different from religions in terms of culture. A religion develops by absorbing the cultures and values of human civilization, which is often mingled with philosophy, law and morality. But a cult refuses to follow moral principles and disdains social order.

Religions and cults differ in terms of organization too. A religious organization is formed voluntarily by believers and formally registered with government departments. Besides, members of a religious organization enjoy legal rights and their activities are legal and beneficial to society.

A cult, on the other hand, more often than not is not registered and does not hold activities legally. Some cults even worship mysterious chiefs, who issue orders to their followers in the name of faith.

Unlike religions that are transparent in procedure, cults often hide facts from their ordinary followers. In this sense, cults are more like underground societies, in which every follower has to obey one above him/her in the order and

those who want to leave are often threatened with dire consequences and even murdered.

Social influence is another aspect that distinguishes a cult from religion. Religion is very important to society because it provides spiritual support to the people. Through its rituals and prayers, a religion also forms a kind of transcendental tie that makes people feel secure in a world of uncertainties. Religion, as a form of philosophy, helps people recognize themselves. It also acts as the central element of some cultural traditions and influences people's development.

A cult fails on all these fronts. All that a cult does to society is to curb its development and threaten the happiness and safety of the people.

Like most countries in the world, China respects its citizens' right to religion, and this principle is clearly stated in its Constitution. The freedom to religious belief in China includes both - to believe in any religion and not to believe in any. And both believers and non-believers are protected by the law.

Cults that threaten non-believers with violence are, in fact, a threat to religious freedom, and must be properly dealt with. The "Church of Almighty God", for example, has more than 1 million followers divided into seven levels, with lower-level followers unconditionally obeying their superiors. Worse, the organization claims that "all non-believers will be killed by lightning", and has formed a group to "punish" people who refuse to join or want to quit the order. The tragedy in Zhaoyuan is the handiwork of such a group.

The Zhaoyuan incident has highlighted the necessity to crack down on cults to better protect people's religious freedom. It has also reminded us that all religions should be open and transparent about their activities and practices. Religions that believe in mysterious and secretive rituals, and underground activities violate the basic values of society; they infringe upon people's rights to life, liberty, property and religion.

The tragic death of the woman in Zhaoyuan should teach people to differentiate between cults and religions and avoid falling into the trap of crooks masquerading as religious practitioners.

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