

# ***Document 188: Concerning the Real Estate of Religious Bodies***

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*Translator's note: This is an old document, drafted July 3, 1980, and issued by the State Council on July 16, 1980. It seems that it has not been translated into English before. With recent news about property disputes in Xi'an and Tianjin, Document 188 may still be relevant.*

## **Report on the Implementation of Policy on Real Estate of Religious Organizations by the State Council's Religious Affairs Bureau and National Construction Committee etc.**

State Council Release (1980) No. 188

To all Provincial, Municipal and Autonomous Regional Governments, all departments and organizations directly under the State Council:

The State Council has endorsed the "Report on the Implementation of Policy on Real Estate of Religious Organizations," drafted by the State Council's Religious Affairs Bureau, National Basic Construction Committee, Foreign Affairs Department, Ministry of Finance, and National Urban Construction General Bureau, and is now circulated to you with the hope that it can be seriously implemented.

The implementation of a policy on real estate of religious organizations is helpful to the carrying out of the principles of independence and autonomy of the Catholic and the Protestant Churches in our country. It is also helpful in the fight against the

infiltration of foreign religious powers, and is also an appropriate means to solve the problem of self-support of religious organizations and the financial needs of religious personnel. Therefore, this task should be dealt with from a political perspective, and be treated as a special issue.

State Council  
July 16, 1980

### **A Report on the Implementation of Policy on the Real Estate of Religious Organizations**

State Council:

Recently the United Front Departments and Religious Affairs Bureaus in some provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions have reflected that religious professionals who relied on rent from real estate, which originally belonged to churches and temples, are now left without a source of income, because rent from these properties ceased during the Cultural Revolution, and several of their former work places have been taken over. Economic policies could not be implemented for a long period of time, and in some areas, the living allowances for religious professionals have been withheld for over a decade and have not yet been repaid. It has been even difficult to cover the expenses for normal religious activities. All of this has kept the policies of Party Central regarding religious work from being completely implemented, and has had a bad political influence. At the same time it has opened a crack for infiltration by foreign Protestant Churches and the Catholic Roman Curia. Although Party Central issued Document 10 in 1979, emphasizing that "All real estate taken from religious bodies should still be handled according to pre-Cultural Revolution methods," yet some local Housing Departments still operate according to a document approved by Party Central in 1963, which was a summary of the Seventh National Religious Works Conference. It

stated: "Property rented out by churches and temples should be handled according to the regulations for the reform of privately rented property." They continue to use the methods that came into effect on September 1, 1966, which ended fixed interest to capitalists. Thus they stopped the guaranteed (fixed) rental payments to religious bodies, and they have not issued back payments to this day. Nor has any rent been paid on properties occupied during the Cultural Revolution. At present, the original bank deposits of religious bodies in many areas are exhausted, or soon will be. Some bank deposits have been frozen since the Cultural Revolution or have been diverted to other work units. Certain phenomena violating government policies and laws have not yet been resolved. As the Religious Affairs Bureaus in the districts concerned mention, to restore the guaranteed (fixed) rental income halted since the Cultural Revolution, to make back payments, and to unfreeze or restore the bank accounts of religious bodies, have become current, pressing problems in religious work that call for a solution. Now we will list the most important situations and give our suggestions.

- 1.) Since Liberation, Party Central and national government organizations have formulated a number of basic policies regarding the real estate of churches and temples. On March 5, 1951, Party Central clearly pointed out how to positively promote the Movement to Improve Religion: "Give practical help to each church unit to implement self-support," and "Think of some ways for them (giving them rent from buildings occupied for public use, helping them sell some properties and giving them the cash, even partially reducing certain of their taxes and levies.)" Article No. 7 of an Internal Affairs Bureau document, "Suggestions for Managing the Real Estate of Temples" also expressly stipulated "Temple property now managed and used by Buddhist and Daoist monks, no matter whether for self-occupancy, for rent, or for socially productive enterprises, after being examined and approved by the local

government, is still allowed to maintain its status quo, and the monks are responsible for maintaining and repairing it.” In order to help each religious group achieve self-support and to maintain the lives of religious professionals, the People’s Government, in addition to permitting churches and temples to rent out real estate, will even exempt churches, temples, and other venues of religious activity, as well as the dwellings of religious professionals, from property taxes. Afterwards, when our nation has attained a situation of overall socialist transformation, local Real Estate Management Bureaus in many cities will gradually implement all-inclusive guaranteed rent (*baozu*) or regular rent (*jingzu*) to give fixed payments (*baozu* and *dingzu*) to religious bodies for the properties they are renting out. These payments will be for the support of religious professionals, and for the repair and maintenance of churches and temples. Adopting the above policy will implement Party Central’s directive to “realize, step by step, the casting away of the influence and economic ties of foreign imperialism on the Church, and to transform it into a self-governing, self-propagating and self-supporting religious enterprise of the Chinese people.” It will expand the anti-imperialist, patriotic United Front among the broad mass of religious believers, solidify the results of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, resist infiltration by foreign churches and the Roman Curia, and unite people in religious circles and the broad masses of believers to follow the socialist road. Practice has proven this to be totally correct.

- 2.) Regarding the socialist transformation of real estate rented out by religious bodies, in order to solve special problems, all should obey the basic policy directives of the Party on religious work. In 1963 Party Central circulated the Summary of the Seventh National Religious Works Conference, which pointed out that “Property rented out by churches and temples should be handled according to the regulations for the reform of privately



rented property.” The spirit of the whole context of this report was to solve the problems of sources of livelihood for religious professionals, and church fees. It was certainly not meant to terminate such income. The rental properties of Catholic and Protestant Churches are special, in the sense that foreign churches originally controlled them. If the government Real Estate Bureau comes forward and seizes these properties, it could have an impact on our foreign relations. Thus on January 13, 1956, the Foreign Affairs Department and the State Council’s Religious Affairs Bureau jointly issued a notice. It was based on the principles for handling U.S. property in China, as Party Central permitted the Party Committee in the Foreign Affairs Department to do in 1954. The 1956 notice stated: “In handling the property of foreign churches, the government in principle should not itself take over the property. Rather, following the development of patriotic movements among religious circles, it should gradually transfer possession of it to the Chinese Church.” Looking at the actual situation, the conditions for transferring foreign church property became ripe at an early date. The Chinese Church clearly should possess it. Society should possess Buddhist and Daoist temples and all their real estate (with the monks having the right to use them and to rent them out). Buddhist nuns should possess living quarters as private houses. Collectives of Muslim believers should possess mosques and their auxiliary buildings. These differ in essence from capitalist possessions. If the rental income of religious bodies is eliminated, and government subsidies are used to solve the livelihood problems of religious professionals, then this easily will create the unfavorable impression of us seizing church property and of a “church run by the government.” It will also seriously obstruct the principle of maintaining self-support, and will be harmful politically and vis-à-vis foreign relations. Thus, no matter how the property and bank accounts of religious bodies are handled, it is not a simple economic problem, but a political problem, and a

serious matter of government policy. Recently Party Central and the State Council promulgated Document 22 (1980), which pointed out that this question should be viewed politically, and dealt with as a special issue.

- 3.) Based on the spirit of Document 22 (1980), in order to implement the policy of freedom of religious belief and the policies of the United Front among religious circles, to maintain the independent administration of the Catholic Church and the Three-Self policies of the Protestant Church, to be useful in the struggle against infiltration by foreign religious forces, we should adopt the following measures to solve the property problems of religious organizations:

- a.) All real estate to which religious bodies have a right should be returned to them. When there is no way to return it, then they should be repaid the monetary value. The rented out portion should continue in the form of an all-inclusive, regular or fixed rent adopted by the local Real Estate Management Bureau before the Cultural Revolution, or religious bodies can take back the property and manage it by themselves, depending on which method is better. The concerned local departments can consult each other and decide. All-inclusive (or fixed) rental fees should still be paid according to the pre-Cultural Revolution standards. If the rental price has dropped, or the Real Estate Management Bureau has difficulty paying the same amount of money, then the concerned local departments may consult each other and adopt ways to solve the problem. Or the Religious Affairs Bureau may solve it by appropriately increasing the religious affairs fee.

- b.) Guaranteed (or fixed) rental income, which has ceased since the Cultural Revolution, should be tallied according to the relevant national regulations and

seeking the truth from facts to settle accounts. The total rent due, minus maintenance expenses, property taxes, management fees, should all be returned, but deficits need not be made up.

- c.) Churches, mosques, temples and their auxiliary buildings, which were occupied for use during the Cultural Revolution, if religious bodies need them for their internal or external work, should be restored to each religion. If a religious body does not need the property for its own use, then the occupying unit or private individual using it should pay rent based on the date of occupation. If the building was re-built or demolished, the monetary value should be evaluated and repaid.
- d.) The local bureaus of Financial Affairs should return to religious bodies every bank account that was frozen during the Cultural Revolution. Compensation should be made for those accounts, which were diverted to other work units.

If the State Council agrees with the above suggestions, please forward them to the relevant departments in all provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities under the central government for implementation.

The State Council's Religious Affairs Bureau  
The National Basic Construction Committee  
The Foreign Affairs Department  
The Ministry of Finance  
The National Urban Construction General Bureau  
July 3, 1980