

## EDITORIAL

**O**n April 22 and 23, 2016, a national conference on religion was held in Beijing. President Xi Jinping, Prime Minister Li Keqiang, Politburo members Zhang Dejiang, Liu Yunshan, Wang Qishan, CPPCC Chairperson Yu Zhengsheng, and many other high officials attended.

The *People's Daily* for April 24th reported on the meeting. We do not have the actual speeches delivered at the meeting. All we have is this Xinhua report as published in the *People's Daily*. The headline reads: "At the National Religious Work Conference, Xi Jinping Emphasizes the Development of Religious Theory under China's Socialist System, and Completely Raising the Standard of Religious Work in the New Circumstances."

President Xi Jinping emphasized the complete implementation of the Party's religious policy. He pointed out that the religious question is a question that the Party must handle well. It concerns harmony in society and unity among the people, as well as the security and unity of the nation, he said. Basically the Party's religious work is going along well, he continued, the Party's patriotic United Front work with religious adherents, as well as the legalization of religion continues to strengthen.

However, the President went on to emphasize that the Party must resolutely maintain its basic religious policy, completely implement the policy of religious freedom, supervise religious affairs according to the law, maintain the policy of independence and autonomy in religious affairs, and positively guide religions to adapt to socialist society. Religious believers must work for the greatest benefit of the nation as a whole. They must support the leadership of the Party and socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Xi maintains that in order to carry out religious work well, the Party must always take the initiative. It must deeply research and securely solve problems that arise in the religious sector. An important responsibility is to support the trend of sinicization of

China's religions. Support each religion in maintaining their own doctrines and liturgies, but at the same time, search among those doctrines and liturgies for things that are complementary for the development of present day China, and explain them in terms of their compatibility to Chinese traditional culture.

Build a healthy relationship with religion, President Xi urges. Religion has many relationships in society, the President points out: between the government and society, between the Party and society and with religious bodies abroad. In all these relationships we must maintain the Party's leadership. We must raise the standards of the legalization of religious work. We must use the law and regulations to supervise religious work and actions. We must also protect the legal rights of the great mass of religious believers. At the same time, we must absolutely prevent foreign forces from using religion to carry out infiltration, and defend against extremist religious thought causing destruction. The President goes on to urge government religious workers to work harder at becoming friendly with religious believers, and to work harder at studying the doctrines of China's religions. At the same time, they must remember that as Party members, they are atheists, and cannot believe in a religion themselves. They must also teach the youth to believe in science.

Many other things were said at the meeting, which cannot be covered here. One difference from past Party meetings on religion was that President Xi's speech seemed to have some flavor of emphasizing what religious affairs workers could learn from religious doctrines which might be beneficial to the development of society. While the emphasis on the adaptation of religion to socialist society is still there, other religious work meetings in the past have urged religions in China to change their doctrines in order to adapt to socialism. President Xi does not do this. On the contrary, he urges religious workers to look for things in religion which are beneficial to society, and in that way religions can adapt to socialism. But make no mistake about it, from this meeting one perceives no change in blanket Party control over religion. (PJB)