

A New Government Circular Concerning Religion

Editorial Comment

In 1982, the Central Committee and the State Council of the People's Government published *Document 19* which Jiang Zemin, General Secretary of the Communist Party, called "a fairly good Marxist document on religious matters". Since that time the government has encountered a number of obstacles to the full implementation of its contents. On February 5, 1991, the government issued a new document, entitled *Circular from Party Central and The State Council Concerning Certain Problems in Further Improving Religious Work*. It is also referred to as Document 6. The *Circular* introduces no substantive new religious policy or regulations. According to the General Secretary, it is only "a further implementation of Document 19".

The new *Circular*, widely communicated to religious leaders of all five major religions, is an attempt on the part of the government to state the problems encountered so far: the failure of government officials to understand the spirit of Document 19; the need to correct the infringement of the religious rights of citizens and the violation of the legal rights of religious bodies. It also proposes a number of preventive measures for correcting abuses, among them: tightening control over party and church leadership and religious activities, in particular, the need to register all places of religious activity in accordance with the law; resisting foreign and local hostile forces intent on subverting government aims, especially through infiltration, and "peaceful evolution".

Dramatic changes throughout Communist countries in Eastern Europe, and the June 4th incident, alerted China's communist leaders to the need for vigilance. Premier Li Peng, at the National Conference on Religious Affairs, in late 1990, remarked that, the struggle against infiltration, subversion, and peaceful evolution will "in the days to come be seriously placed before us."

Document 6 would seem to overestimate the power of religion to effect social change in China, where only a poor segment of society and a minuscule number of adherents are involved, and underestimate the achievement of the government, whose "open door" policy is fast placing it on par with the world's leading nations.

The document, quoted extensively in Hong Kong newspapers, has been published in its totality by *Bridge*, a bi-monthly magazine of the CHRISTIAN STUDY CENTRE ON CHINESE CULTURE AND RELIGION. Because of the importance of this new document, we reprint it here with *Bridge's* permission.

A Circular from Party Central and The State Council Concerning Certain Problems in Further Improving Religious Work.

To the Party committees and people's governments of each Province, autonomous region, and city directly under the central government, to the Party committees of the main military districts, to each departmental committee of Party Central and government organs, to each headquarters under the military committee, to the Party committees of every branch of the armed forces and to every people's organization:

Since the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee, through the common effort of Party committees at every level and the government and the patriotic organizations, the Party's religious policy has been progressively implemented and religious work has achieved remarkable success. Having opened and arranged places for religious activity, having restored or set up patriotic religious organizations, having protected by law and policy the right of citizens to freedom of religious belief and the legal right of religious organizations to normal religious activity, and having dealt with unlawful and criminal activity carried out in the name of religion, religious activity in most places is normal. The patriotic and socialistic consciousness of religious personages has been raised. They support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and the socialist system. In a positive way they assist the Party and government in implementing religious policy. They have made a great contribution towards maintaining social stability and ethnic unity, as well as promoting unity in the motherland and developing friendly international relations. The Party-led Patriotic United Front among the religious circles of each nationality has been further strengthened and enlarged, and the believing masses of each nationality positively participate in the establishment of the socialist material and spiritual civilizations. Experience has shown that the Party and government's religious policy is correct and that the general

situation of religious work is good. However, we must be aware that hostile forces from abroad have been using religion as an important means of promoting their strategy of "peaceful evolution," and they are continually engaging in activities of infiltration and sabotage. Separatists among the national minorities have also been using religion to stir up trouble, to attack the leadership of the Party and the socialist system, and to destroy national and ethnic unity. In some places a few enemy elements run rampant. They have set up unlawful organizations and struggle with us for authority over temples and churches. Some have established scripture schools, religious institutes and seminaries to struggle with us for the allegiance of the youth. Some temples have restored the system of feudal religious privileges and oppressive exploitation which had been abolished in the past. Situations of religious interference in government administration, in courts of law, and in educational circles have appeared on some grassroots levels. At the same time it must be noted that many problems still remain in the implementation of the policy of religious freedom. Some local authorities infringe upon the citizens' right to religious freedom and upon the legal rights of temples and churches. They interfere in the normal affairs and activities of religious bodies. Longstanding problems concerning the return of religious properties and buildings to their rightful owners have yet to be solved. Social contradictions arise from time to time because religious questions have not been properly handled. Party committees and governments at every level should clearly recognize the complicated and critical nature of these problems and attach great importance to religious work.

The correct treatment and handling of religious questions is an important matter in our country's task of socialist construction. It is an important element in the establishment of a socialism with Chinese characteristics. Carrying out religious work well has great significance for maintaining social stability, increasing ethnic unity, unifying the motherland, and promoting modernization. Document #19, issued by Party Central in 1982 and entitled "The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question During Our Country's Socialist Period," is an important document for guiding our religious work, and we must conscientiously continue to implement it. We must maintain the continuity and stability of the religious policy. In the days

ahead the fundamental duty of the Party and the government regarding the religious policy is: to implement fully the Party's religious policy, protect the citizens' right of religious freedom, increase education in patriotism and socialism for the believing masses and religious leaders, bring into play their positive factors, support their beneficial undertakings, strengthen and develop the patriotic united front with religious circles, carry out the administration of religious affairs in accordance with the law, put a stop to and attack the use of religion to perpetrate unlawful and criminal activities, and firmly resist the infiltrating activities of hostile religious forces abroad. All this must be done in order to maintain stability, increase unity, unify the motherland and develop our country. Now concerning problems in further improving religious work, they are as follows:

I. Fully and Correctly Implement the Policy of Religious Freedom

To respect and protect religious freedom is the longstanding fundamental policy of both the Party and the government in dealing with religious questions. Freedom of religious belief is a right granted to citizens by the Constitution. Citizens have the freedom to believe in religion and the freedom not to believe in religion. No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. Religious activity must be carried out within the confines of the law and of policy. The state protects normal religious activity. When citizens are exercising their right of religious freedom, they also have the obligation of performing their duty. No one may make use of religion to oppose the leadership of the Party or the socialist system. Nor may anyone endanger the unity of the country, social stability and unity among nationalities. No one may cause harm to society or to the common good, nor obstruct the legitimate rights of other citizens. No one may use religion to interfere in government administration, courts of law, education in schools or socialist public education. Religion may not be used to obstruct activities carried out under the compulsory education system. No one may restore the already abolished system of religious feudal privileges and oppressive exploitation. Relations between

believers and non-believers, or relations among believers of different religions or denominations, should be characterized by mutual respect and unity. In places where non-believers are in the majority, attention must be paid to respecting and protecting the rights of the minority of religious believers. Where believers are in the majority, attention must be given to respecting and protecting the rights of the minority non-believers. Unity between believers and non-believers must be fostered, so that both may work together to carry out the task of socialist modernization.

In implementing the policy of religious freedom, we must resolutely correct incidents of infringement on citizens' rights of religious freedom and on the legitimate rights of religious personages. In localities where places for religious activity are too few, we must solve the problem of the need for places for normal religious activity and handle well any remaining problems regarding church properties. This is beneficial for unifying the broad mass of religious believers and for national and social stability.

II. Carry Out Supervision of Religious Affairs in Accordance with the Law

To carry out supervision of religion in accordance with the law refers to the implementation of laws, regulations and policies concerning religion through which the government exercises administrative management and supervision over it. In accordance with the law the government protects the legal rights of religious organizations and of temples and churches. It protects religious professionals when they carry out normal religious affairs and activities. It protects the normal religious activities of the believing masses. It prevents and curbs unlawful elements from using religion and religious activities to create disturbances and commit crimes, and it resists foreign hostile forces abroad from making use of religion for infiltration. The exercise of supervision over religious affairs has as its purpose to bring religious activities within the scope of the law, regulations and policy. It does not mean to interfere in normal religious activity and in the internal affairs of religious organizations.

All places of religious activity should be registered in ac-

cordance with the law (practical measures will be formulated separately). Places of religious activity which have been registered receive the protection of the law. Under the administrative leadership of the government Religious Affairs Bureaus, the patriotic religious organizations and the professional religious personnel are responsible for supervising these places in accordance with the principles of democratic management. Approval of the people's government above the county level must be obtained in order to open new places for religious activity. We must resolutely curb the evangelistic practices and other kinds of unlawful missionary activity carried out by self-styled preachers. We must suppress in accordance with the law illegally established scripture schools, seminaries, and theologates.

Our country's religious bodies and religious affairs must adhere to the principle of the independent and autonomous administration of their religions and not be subject to any foreign domination. On the basis of equality and friendship, religious bodies should positively and correctly develop religious relationships with foreign religious bodies, but they should firmly resist any attempt by hostile religious forces abroad to control our country's religions. It is not permitted for any foreign religious body or individual to interfere in our country's religious affairs. Nor are they permitted to establish a business office, build churches and temples or carry out missionary activity in our country. The concerned departments of the government will draft measures for controlling religious books, tapes, videos and other propaganda materials which enter our country from abroad, and strengthen supervision over them. All those which contain reactionary material expressing opposition to the four basic principles or to the government must be confiscated in accordance with the law. No one may receive religious subsidies or missionary funds from abroad which have infiltration as their object. Permission for our religious bodies or temples and churches to receive large monetary gifts from foreign religious organizations or believers must be obtained from the highest level of the provincial government or from the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council. If our religious bodies invite foreign religious organizations or individuals to visit our country, or if they themselves are invited to travel abroad, permission must first be obtained from the highest levels of the provincial government or from the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State

Council. To participate in a notable activity overseas, approval must first be obtained from the State Council. If our religious bodies are invited abroad by non-religious organizations, if they welcome organizations having some religious background, or if important and influential religious persons come to China to visit or for tourism, the Religious Affairs Bureau should be notified. When departments such as trade, technology, culture, education, health, sports and tourism are undertaking foreign exchange and cooperation, if such exchange involves foreign religious organizations, affiliate organs or individuals, the agreement of cooperation to be signed should not contain articles permitting missionary work, the establishment of religious offices or the building of churches and temples.

We must hasten the work of formulating religious legislation. The Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council needs to draw up a draft of administrative regulations for religious affairs as soon as possible. Then based on the concerned national laws and regulations, each province, autonomous region and central government municipality can formulate local regulations for administering religious affairs suited to the actual conditions of that area.

Government authorities at the grass-roots should strengthen their leadership over religious work, conscientiously implement Party and national religious policy, and help the religious professionals and the mass of believers to supervise effectively their places of religious activity and to carry out their religious activities in accordance with the law.

III. Fully Bring Into Play the Function of the Patriotic Religious Organizations

The patriotic religious organizations are bridges of the Party and government for uniting and educating religious personages. Fully bringing into play the function of the patriotic religious organizations will guarantee that they will be the chief organizations for carrying out well the Party's policy of normalizing religious activity. We must conscientiously correct the situation in some places where the functions of the patriotic religious organizations are insufficiently exercised. We must encourage and assist them in strengthening their organizations, in acting independently in accordance with their own special circum-

stances and constitutions, and in giving full play to their positive characteristics. We must encourage and support them in their projects of self-support, service and enterprises beneficial to society. We must help them to solve problems connected with the carrying out of their work, such as office space, expenses, and the difficulties in some places concerning the livelihood of religious professionals. Every patriotic religious organization should accept the leadership of the Party and the government, obey the laws of the country, practice the tradition of self-education, regularly conduct education of religious professionals in patriotism, socialism, current affairs and policy, and in national laws and regulations, and continually heighten awareness of safeguarding the interests of the nation and people and of persevering in the principle of independence and autonomy.

Most of our country's religious personages are patriotic and law-abiding. Their cooperation with the Party and the government is long-standing, and they are an important force for maintaining stability in the country and society, for contacting the believers and for the effective administration of religious affairs. Organs at all levels of Party leadership should regularly listen to the opinions and suggestions of the patriotic religious organizations and religious personages, and fully discuss with them important questions touching upon religious affairs. Support and assist the patriotic religious organizations to run well religious academies. Help them to train in a planned and organized way a band of religious professionals who fervently love the motherland, accept the Party's leadership, persevere in following socialism, safeguard national and ethnic unity, have religious knowledge and are adept at contacting religious believers. At the present time also, augment the training of those in charge of temples, churches and other places of religious activity.

IV. Resolutely Attack Those Who Use Religion to Carry Out Criminal Activities

While protecting citizens' rights of religious freedom and normal religious activities, it is also necessary to resolutely attack those counterrevolutionaries and other criminal elements who make use of religion to carry out destructive activities. Public security departments at all levels must adopt effective

measures to firmly put a stop to the use of religious questions to stir up the masses, to disturb social order and to destroy national and ethnic unity. Law-breakers must be dealt with in accordance with the law. But those chief culprits who conspire with hostile forces abroad to harm the security of the nation must be punished severely. Regarding those places of illegal religious activity, if the circumstances are slight, criticize and educate those involved and give them a certain period of time to mend their ways. If they refuse to do so, or the circumstances are more serious, then deal with them in accordance with the law.

In our work we must strictly distinguish and correctly deal with the two different kinds of contradiction, have a correct grasp of policy, unite with and depend upon the patriotic religious forces, divide and break up the hostile forces, win over the masses who are influenced and controlled by the hostile forces, and isolate the few chief leaders among them.

The national judicial departments should, in accordance with the law, give a legal explanation of the punishment imposed for using religion to carry out criminal activity. Public security organs should mutually cooperate to attack criminal activity in accordance with the law.

V. Strengthen Religious Work Organs and Augment the Ranks of Religious Work Cadres

In order to better improve religious work, government religious work organs must be strengthened. In provinces (autonomous regions, cities directly under the central government), municipalities (local and prefectural) and counties (districts), where religious work responsibilities are particularly onerous, the government should set up religious work organs and have them entered into the government ranks. Counties (districts) which already have religious work organs should maintain them; those which have not yet established religious work organs should collaborate with the concerned departments so that professional cadres can be provided. Towns and villages which have religious work responsibilities should place someone in charge of religious work; where the responsibilities are heavy, professional cadres should be provided.

We must attach great importance to the training of religious work cadres and continually raise their standards. Religious

work cadres should be completely familiar with the significance and responsibilities of their work. They should conscientiously study Marxist philosophy and religious theory, as well as the Party's policies. They must be familiar with the laws concerning religion and have a firm knowledge of religious work. They should be adept at uniting religious personages and the mass of believers. They should gradually form themselves into religious work cadres who possess excellent political qualities, a fine work style and a high degree of competence. Party committees and governments at all levels should be concerned about the politics, work and livelihood of religious work cadres.

VI. Strengthen the Party's Leadership Over Religious Work

The most important leadership the Party exercises over religious work is political leadership. So members must have a good grasp of the political direction and of the most important policies. Party committees and governments at every level must put religious work on their agendas, and at definite periods study and analyze the condition of religious work. They should conscientiously examine the situation of the implementation of religious policy, and promptly solve any remaining problems. They should mobilize the whole Party and all levels of government and society to give further attention to a concern for carrying out religious work well, so that religion and a socialist society can mutually adapt to one another.

Comrades at all levels of Party leadership and the United Front Departments of the Party should carry out well their work with the representatives of religious circles. Increase contact with them, explain Party policies to them, inform them of relevant matters, listen to their opinions with an open mind, and help them to solve problems in their work.

Party committees and governments at all levels should reinforce political thought work and guide propaganda organs in carrying out the education of the broad masses in patriotism, socialism and national unity. Educate the masses positively, especially the youth, in dialectical and historical materialism (including atheism). Train the broad mass of youth to become a new generation that possesses ideals, virtue, culture and discipline. Guide and assist labor unions, Communist youth organi-

zations and women's federations to launch various kinds of healthy and beneficial activities. Show concern for and help workers, youth, and women to overcome the difficulties they meet in work or in life and teach them to deal correctly with such problems as birth, old age, sickness, death, fortune and misfortune. Help them to acquire a scientific worldview and concept of life. It is not permitted for published works which touch upon religion to violate the Party and government's religious policy or hurt the feelings of the believing masses. It is also not permitted to use religion to distort history or to harm national and ethnic unity.

Communist Party members may not believe in religion, nor may they participate in religious activities. Patiently educate Party members who take part in religious activities. Help them to acquire a correct worldview, to draw clear boundaries between atheism and theism and to affirm their faith in communism. For those who persist in their ways, encourage them to withdraw from the Party. Towards those who take part in stirring up religious fervor and support the indiscriminate building of temples and churches, earnestly carry out criticism and education. If they are still unrepentant after being educated, expel them from the Party. As for the problem of Party members who live at the grass-roots in those minority areas where the whole people basically believe in religion, and who take part in mass activities having a religious flavor and belonging to minority traditions, follow the directives of Party Central.

After all Party committees and governments receive this circular, then on the basis of a complete investigation of the implementation of religious policy, conscientiously sum up the lessons learned from dealing with religious questions. In light of the actual situation of each locality, formulate concrete measures and conscientiously implement them. The Party committees and governments of each province, autonomous region and central government directed cities should send a written report to Party Central and to the State Council summing up the investigation into the situation.

Central Committee of the CPC
The State Council
February 5, 1991