

An Outline of Religious Affairs for 1996

by the Director of the Religious Affairs Bureau

(issued by the People's Consultative Conference News)

Editor's note: The Director of the Religious Affairs Bureau, Ye Xiaowen, recently gave a special report at a Religious Affairs Meeting on the direction religious work would take in 1996. The People's Consultative Conference News (PCC) published the concluding section of his talk, in the "Religion and the Nation" section of its publication on February 1, 1996. It was entitled: "Stress Three Matters." The report was translated for Tripod by Norman Walling, S.J.

The Central Government has already declared the following to be the main policy for religious work. Two points stand out: stress what is important; stress what is practical. This year's religious work can be summed up quite simply as stress: 1) place, 2) important issues and 3) discipline.

Stress registration of places for religious activities

Since the State Council published its *Regulations regarding the management of religious activities*, and on its own authority, the Religious Affairs Bureau published *Registration procedures for venues for religious activities*, registration has proceeded quite remarkably, thanks to the efforts of all involved in the work. Preliminary statistics show that now 13 provinces (regions, municipalities) have completed the task; nine provinces (regions, municipalities) are on the verge of completing it; three provinces (regions) are in the process of re-organizing their registration procedures and five provinces (regions, municipalities) are about to begin. At this rate, the original estimate of three years to complete the fundamental work of registration can be met.

This work must continue in those places where it has already begun. Those delegated with the task should study and learn from the successful experiences of other places and diligently apply their methods in their own areas. However, they should guard against undue haste and superficiality in the work. Despite the late start,

success in other places should serve as guidelines and help to prevent many errors. What is important is to pay close attention to actual situations and to catch up with the present pace.

In those areas where the essential work has already been completed, results should be checked against the *Regulations regarding the management of religious activities* and the *Registration procedures for venues for religious activities*. There should be a final review of the work before each province sends its written report to the provincial government and to the State Council's Religious Affairs Bureau.

Our aim is not registration for its own sake, but to use registration as a means to tighten lawful control over places for religious activities as well as on all religious activities themselves. Registration is a link in the systematic process of exerting lawful control over these activities. Mere registration of religious places, however, cannot substitute for the thorough implementation of the State Council's decree No. 145. The experiences of some places prove that carrying out yearly inspections is the best way to improve the supervisory and investigative functions of religious bureaus and a very effective means of consolidating results obtained from registration.

Our aim is not registration for its own sake, but to use registration as a means to tighten lawful control over places for religious activities as well as on all religious activities themselves. Registration is a link in the systematic process of exerting lawful control over these activities.

The Religious Affairs Bureau is in the process of drawing up its own procedures for registering places for religious activities. Everyone present at this meeting is earnestly requested to offer amendments. Each local office can consult these regulations to see how they apply to their own specific situations. Then, as a result of their own yearly inspections, devise relevant ways to speed up the implementation. We must improve our registration work, take appropriate measures, tighten our day-to-day control, and remain constantly on the alert to

learn from our experience how to control places for religious activities. Great care must be taken in this work to collect, store and analyze data in order to gain complete control of the situation.

In the next two years, any success in this work will depend on making greater and more conscientious efforts to improve it and in having cadres committed to the work. If we succeed in this, nationwide registration can be completed within the allotted time; i.e., by the end of 1996. We shall indeed then have accomplished a major task.

Stress study, strengthen leadership, emphasize essentials, tackle difficulties, resolve urgent issues

Religious Work has many aspects. Provincial Religious Affairs Bureaus or higher agencies must guard against thinking that short term preparations suffice, and then come up short in the long run. I mean, when it comes to religion, there are no small matters. That is why this work is so important. We need to distinguish between what is important from what is not and we must avoid trying to tend to big and small matters all at once. Religious work is a complicated business with various levels of complexities. Within its system there are various positions and strategic points. Leading cadres in the Religious Affairs Bureaus above provincial level must pay close attention to the various aspects of the different levels, deal with the complex problems and important points. They must strengthen their leadership, be bold in taking responsibility, make conscientious efforts to understand and implement laws, regulations, and policies. They must know and thoroughly grasp the vital issues, pay close attention to methods and strategies; be skilled and daring in getting to the heart of the matter, face difficulties head on and defuse the issues. To do this requires effort and fact finding research. A certain skill is needed to direct the work of classifying, defining, arranging time periods and allocating each individual's role. The most important factor is fact finding research. If our cadres do not do this research, we shall have nothing to say, and no right to the salary we earn for our livelihood.

The State Council's Religious Affairs Bureau is joining forces with the government's United Front Department, the State Council's

Research Institute, and the Research Center on Constructing Socialism with Chinese Characteristics under the Central Committee's Party School to initiate a complete and thorough investigation on the present situation of religion and new questions generated by it. A further aim is to offer a complete and accurate evaluation of the religious situation and these new questions along with a systematic analysis of the situation since the publication of the Central Committee's 1982 *Document Nineteen* and especially 1991's *Document Six*. Several suggestions will be made to provide direction for religious work as we head into the new century. To this end we shall strive do our best to make a timely report to the Party's Central Committee and the State Council.

Build up two pronged disciplines

Building up cadre work teams with sound political foundations, the ability to work well and with proficiency in the requisite knowledge and skills is the only correct way to implement religious policy. These teams of cadres are the only groups guaranteed to carry out legal control over religious affairs. These teams must be specialized in knowledge, politics, be honest and straightforward.

*However, much of the leadership
in these patriotic associations
is in an unhealthy,
even paralyzed state
and successors are in short supply.*

The present situation of religious work teams is still far from what the Central Committee and the actual work require. There are many changes taking place in the work teams. Many younger cadres and those from other government posts are now replenishing the ranks. This is all to the good, but it also tells us that we need to expand our training. Under new circumstances religious work is now facing new situations and new problems. Therefore there is need to bolster the cadres' knowledge and training. This year we intend to

inaugurate an important educational campaign on the Marxist concept of religion and on the Party's religious policy. The State Council's Religious Affairs Bureau will soon consult with the relevant departments to prepare a joint document on this matter. This campaign's main data will be taken from the Central Party's research files and from those of the Attorney General's office of the Religious Affairs Bureau. These two entities have jointly issued *Selected Documentation from the Present Day Religious Work and Important Policy Points*. They will assign or reprint additional reference materials for the cadres' use. The Religious Affairs Bureau will train religious workers on the highest provincial level; the provincial Religious Affairs Bureaus will be responsible for training cadres in their respective provinces. In this way, cadres on all levels will be familiar with the actual situation. We must be unstinting in our efforts to train teams of religious work cadres who will shoulder their responsibilities as we enter the new millennium..

Building up cadre work teams with sound political foundations, the ability to work well and with proficiency in the requisite knowledge and skills is the only correct way to implement religious policy

A still more urgent and pressing duty is to built up the Patriotic Associations and religious professionals. These patriotic associations serve as bridges between the Party and government and help in winning over, uniting and educating religious persons. Their function is one of active participation in this task. However, much of the leadership in these patriotic associations is in an unhealthy, even paralyzed state and successors are in short supply. Therefore, revitalizing these associations and training religious leaders can admit of no delay. We must take the "four safeguards" as important points; in dealing with religious people in order to promote patriotism, socialism, and education in the laws. We must also encourage religious professionals to take Comrade Jiang Zemin's words to heart; namely, "uniting to make progress in loving one's country and one's church," continue to stress each religion's patriotic traditions, reinforce ethnic reform and oppose counter-revolutionary activities. Religious

professionals must strengthen their confidence and pride in their own nationality, and firmly aim at independent, autonomous management of their churches. We must make every effort to foster and strengthen the training of mature young religious professionals, who are loyal to the government, capable of hard work and help them attain proficiency in their religious studies. We, in due time, should be bold in employing them and sending them out to replace church leadership. They should become competent as soon as possible in their work so that they can take hold of and solve new and present problems. Beginning this year, religious organizations all over the country will be facing changes of offices. Cadres in religious departments must direct and help carry out this process, reinforcing the ideological framework of religious organizations as well as the organizations themselves.

The Party's eleventh plenum of the fifteenth Central Committee formulated a proposal for the ninth five-year plan containing a long range plan extending to the year 2001. The plan is a magnificent blueprint for the entire Party and for all the country's citizens to follow. It will make China a strong and wealthy country with a revitalized people. The part that cadres in religious work play in this magnificent blueprint is that they share in the task of building up socialism with Chinese characteristics. They must fit into the economic development that will take place during the following five to fifteen years. The Party's Central Committee has already included religious work within its economic planning for the next fifteen years. This fact should make all Party members, especially Party leaders, value their religious work highly and encourage them to do it as well as possible, and even to multiply their efforts.
