

Documentation

The Ministry of the Public Security and the Religious Affairs Bureaus

by Anthony Lam

*(The following is a digest of Chapter 2 of Anthony Lam's new book, **Chinese Communist Religious Policy and its Implementation over the last fifty years**. The chapter is entitled, "The Ministry of the Public Security and Religious Affairs Bureaus." The book, published in Chinese, has been translated into English by Norman Walling, S.J. The digest is the work of the English executive editor.)*

The purpose of the following documentation is to give the reader an idea of the working policies and general functions of two government bodies that are directly involved in the implementation of China's religious policy: the Public Security Bureau, and the Religious Affairs Bureau. Much of the material is taken from *Central Government Agencies*, a book edited jointly by the Secretariat of the State Council and the Central Publishing Committee and published in Beijing in February 1955, by the Chinese Development Press. The book was written in response to the Eighth National People's Congress' call for the reform of all departments under the State Council.



The Public Security Bureau

Central Government Agencies lists only two items under the Public Security Bureau: Functional Charges and Major Responsibilities. It omits any mention of its interior structures, staff organization and its leadership positions with their number and titles. This makes it impossible for the outsider to know anything about its internal apparatus and how it functions.

Role and Function of the Public Security Bureau

1. To reinforce macro-policy decisions and command functions on the national level. To strengthen the coordination of whatever pertains to the handling of major operations, actions, events and emergencies that are directly concerned with security matters on the national (supra-provincial) and international level.

2. To reinforce those supervisory functions that deal with public security. Support investigative studies and the composition of laws and regulations that pertain to matters of national security. Be vigilant and careful in maintaining social stability and dealing with any emergencies that may arise in this area.

3. To reinforce those supervisory functions that deal with ideology, organization and the operating methods of the Public Security Bureau and police. As part of the reform movement, set up a unified and systematic police force.

4. To simplify procedures and delegate authority for inspecting fire fighting and other public safety equipment to the pertinent departments and other subsidiary units.

Comment: It is important to note that within the PSB there exists a special branch whose function is to oversee religious matters. This differentiates the Chinese PSB from similar bureaus in other nations. It also indicates a lack of trust in religion since the government authorities consider religion to be in need of constant surveillance.

Moreover, the PSB has yet to shake off its 'wartime mentality' that prevailed at the onset of the PRC in 1949. A careful reading of the Bureau's sixteen "Principle Duties" reveals the Bureau's ongoing militant attitude:

1. Formulate with care the pertinent principles, policies, rules and regulations of the PSB that govern the work of the Bureau on the national level, and direct, examine and oversee their implementation in all its local branches.

2. Study new conditions and new problems which arise from reform policies; carry out reforms in matters dealing with security; explore and establish methods and administrative systems that are in conformity with national security needs and are also imbued with Chinese characteristics.

3. Exert control and power over information; analyze situations for possible hostile elements that may threaten public security, devise countermeasures to disarm them before they actually take place.

4. Take charge of cases dealing with counter revolutionaries, special agents, spies and all criminal activity that endangers national security; organize and coordinate responses to major disturbances and all other large scale operations that involve a threat to national security.

5. Direct local security agencies, insuring their management of social order by registering households, issuing resident permits, and entrance and exit visas according to law.

6. Regulate traffic control and administer road safety programmes on a national level.

7. Set up security organizations in local institutions, such as offices, schools, companies and other existing social groups to be overseen by the local branches of the PSB.

8. Maintain security over national computer information systems.

9. Be responsible for the security arrangements for Party leaders, government officials and foreign dignitaries.

10. Oversee the management of pre-and post-trial detention centres.

11. Administer the work programmes related to maintaining standards and a revolutionary spirit among Public Security military personnel and the ongoing training of the Public Security plain clothes police officers.

12. Administrate the updating of military technology for the Public Service forces.

13. Organize and maintain communication links with the Hong Kong and Macau police departments as well as all other international police organizations.

14. Set up and direct the internal police security organizations, including border guards, fire fighters and military security personnel.

15. Public Security Agencies within the following bureaus: Railroad, Communications, Airlines, Forestry and the Central Administration Office of Security should continue to be listed under the Public Security Bureau and the Central Administrative Office; however, the Public Security Bureau is to be the supervisor in charge of all essentially professional work.

16. Undertake to carry out any work commissioned by the Party Central Committee and the State Council.

Comment: The third item on the list, namely, the directive to take steps to disarm possible 'hostile situations' that may threaten public security certainly reveals a siege mentality on the part of the Central Government. It manifests an attitude of suspicion, one which is always on the look out for the appearance of possible enemies. It also reveals an insecurity and an apprehension about constant potential dangers to the State and the Party.

Religious people see the Public Security Bureau as having a direct control over their lives which they see as neither necessary nor warranted.

The main duty of the special agency of the PSB which oversees religious matters is to deal with those religious activities that are not recognized by the government and which fall outside the jurisdiction of the Religious Affairs Bureau.

While religious organizations in present day China are a very distinct minority, the PSB exerts a control over them that is far greater than that exerted over any other civil organizations.

The State Council's Religious Affairs Bureau

The role and function of the State Council's Religious Affairs Bureau is delineated in great detail in *Central Government Agencies* in the section entitled "Functional Charges". The Bureau's main task is no longer merely to deal with religious matters as they arise in the concrete, but rather it is charged with their overall direction and administration.

This mandate enables the Religious Affairs Bureau to concentrate its attention on matters involving overall policies, research and planning. Ten "Main Duties" are listed.

1. To formulate pertinent, concrete policies and administrative regulations governing religious activities, and to set up supervisory controls to oversee them.

2. In accordance with the law, to safeguard freedom of religious belief for all citizens, to safeguard the right of religious officials to exercise normal control

over religious activities, to safeguard the legal rights of religious bodies and their places of activity; to encourage the promotion of patriotism and socialism among religious people; to support the education of religious people in national unity and ethnic harmony; to develop and strengthen the efforts of the United Front among all religious nationalities; and to unify and mobilize religious believers to the service of continuing reform and economic stability.

3. To investigate and scrutinize the particular situation of each religious body, keeping abreast of their internal developments and trends, for the purpose of offering suggestions that might eventually lead to the drawing up of appropriate new policies.

4. Assist religious groups to develop according to each one's special characteristics but within the scope of constitutional law, and to arrange for the assistance of other government agencies wherever it may be required.

5. Direct the work of local government Religious Affairs Bureaus, organizing courses on the national level for their cadres.

6. Offer appropriate assistance to the local government in emergencies that may arise suddenly from religious quarters and that might pose a threat to social stability.

7. Organize and direct educational studies of religious theory and practice, the legal system, and also government religious policies.

8. (Blank)

9. (Blank)

10. Undertake to perform all other tasks commissioned by the State Council.

Comment: The two blanks, numbers 8 and 9 on the list, seem to have gone missing. They generate a note of mystery about the true work of the Bureau. However, it is this writer's contention that the Bureau has nothing to hide. Most likely, these two items deal with implementing counter infiltration measures within religious circles and the question of promoting education in atheism. Convenience seems to have dictated that these two subjects be omitted from the present list.

The "counter infiltration measures" occur in a great deal of the literature and are found in many official documents. Liu Lie's edition of *National Agencies of the People's Republic of China* states that during the

1980's Number 8 on the list directed the Religious Affairs Bureau to: "Cooperate with other government agencies to expose and attack current counter-revolutionary activities and other crimes committed by those operating under the guise of religion."

The government promoted atheism assiduously during the 1990's. In his speech to the heads of the Religious Affairs Bureau on February 21, 1992, Chen Junsheng of the 13th Party Central Committee said that "religious departments must cooperate and join with the relevant departments in promoting dialectical materialism, including atheism, among the masses, especially among the young; and also promote scientific education to establish a humanistic world view... [This] emphasis must be placed on religious work in rural areas, and materialism [must continue to be] propagated in urban areas."

Chen clearly saw the propagating of atheism as being of equivalent value in doing 'religious work'. While Chen mentions the "importance of religious work in the rural areas," his words in no way indicate a relaxation of government control over religious activity in the urban areas. The government sees supervision of religion in both the urban and rural areas as equally important.

As late as 1993, Jiang Zemin himself was pushing the cadres to strengthen the propagation of atheism. This writer, along with many other believers, looks forward to a day when believers and atheists alike can come together in an atmosphere of openness and mutual respect to discuss the question of atheistic propaganda.

Role and Function of the Religious Affairs Bureau

The State Council's Religious Affairs Bureau is organized into four sub-divisions: the Administrative Office or Personnel Department; the Policy and Legal Department; Executive Department A, which deals with matters pertaining to Buddhism, Daoism and Islam, and Executive Department B or the External Affairs Department, whose work pertains to the Catholic and Protestant churches; and, the Party Committee.

The duties of the Administrative Office are as follows:

- To assist bureau leaders in handling their daily work load;
- to coordinate the departmental tasks of the various organs;
- to oversee the work of the secretary and all written and electronic communication networks;
- to organize regular inspections of offices and files;

- to supervise the finances and allocation of capital funding to all bureau agencies and religious bodies throughout the country;
- to supervise bureau properties and those of other units directly under its control;
- to take responsibility for the hiring and firing, the salaries and training of all personnel;
- to establish within the office administrative supervision procedures, safety precautions, and
- be responsible for employing professional advisors for agencies of the bureau and for religious bodies on a nationwide basis.

This text clearly indicates government control over the religious bodies through its supervision of finances. Mr. Liu Peng, an assistant research fellow of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, in defining the nature of the relationship that exists between the state and religion in general has written: "To obtain state recognition and cooperation, a prerequisite for religion is to recognize the authority of the state, accept state leadership, and implement state policies. The state in turn exercises administrative control over religion."

Applying this supposition to social conditions in China, Liu states that the relationship belongs "to the model wherein the state controls religion." His opinion, however, has not found universal acceptance among other Chinese scholars on the mainland.

It is the main duty of the Policy and Legal Department "to formulate policies and regulations for religion; to study religious trends and their development in China and propose ways to deal with them; to take charge of domestic and foreign propaganda; to initiate and implement programmes for training those cadres working in the religious field; and to take charge of collecting information, providing summary documentation and supervising all aspects of their publication and dissemination."

We must mention in passing that the State Council's Religious Affairs Bureau underwent a major reorganization in 1995. A number of research departments were added as well as publications dealing directly with religion. They also opened their main quarterly "Religions in China" to the general public. As a result of such changes, the RAB has moved away from politics to create a more scholarly climate, an atmosphere that is more conducive to nurturing a positive religious dialogue. During the past decade, the RAB has rarely published the results of its religious studies. Consequently, the Academy of Social Sciences' Research Centre has, by default, taken over the leadership in religious studies. Now the Bureau is hurrying to make up lost ground by assuming a much more active stance.

The duties of Executive Department B, which shares with Department A the responsibility of managing religious affairs, are as follows:

- to be responsible for work dealing with the Catholic and Protestant churches;
- to study all pertinent questions and offer suggestions for religious policies;
- to keep close contact with religious bodies nationwide;
- to assist religious bodies in the management of their religious academies;
- to be responsible for department organs and external affairs of religious bodies throughout the country, as well as maintaining friendly relations with those of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau;
- to implement the government's aims, policies and regulations concerning religious matters, and to assist the pertinent departments and local groups in all questions having to do with religion.

A brief look at the duties of Executive Department A will serve to point out the differences between the two.

- To be responsible for work dealing with Buddhists, Daoists and Muslims;
- to carry out studies on major questions that are pertinent to them and make suggestions for creating policies;
- to assist the relevant religious bodies in managing their religious academies;
- to study the history and present conditions of each ethnic religious group.

A quick comparison of the two departments shows that the government places more emphasis on national minorities in Department A, while in Department B, there is more of a concern with international relationships. However, this is only a point of emphasis. The government is still very much concerned about the overall development of Christianity within its own borders.

The entire administrative staff of the State Council's Religious Affairs Bureau numbers only seventy people. Staff positions include: a Bureau head, three assistants, fifteen deputies and one full time assistant secretary of the Party Committee within the Bureau. In terms of staff qualifications, Bureau officials point out the increasing need for better educated personnel to meet the demands of recent years. Cadres must have reached a university level of education, and the goal in training now is towards professional competence to keep the Bureau in line with modern trends. The present Bureau head, Ye Xiaowen, has himself quietly engaged the services of a scholar from a foreign research institute. All of this, I believe will open up new frontiers within the Bureau, and it argues well for a more reasoned and better informed approach by the Bureau to religious questions in the future.

As the government's approach to religious work becomes more professional and is brought more in line with acceptable international norms, the grey clouds of previous policies and legislation will gradually dissipate.

This will, no doubt, increase the governments clarity and efficiency; however, it might also reduce the breathing space now afforded religious bodies by present ambivalence. Whether this bodes well or badly for the future remains to be seen.■

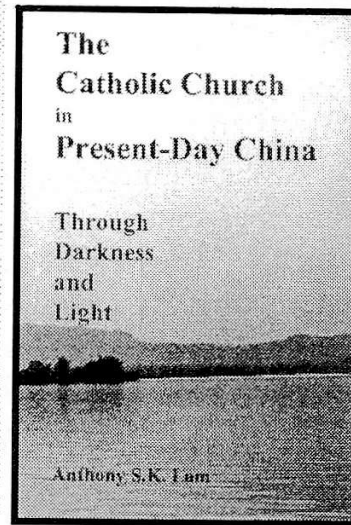
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