

A Review and Reflection on Religious Work at the Turn of the Century

Seriously study and solve major problems that affect the overall situation

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The last ten years of the 20th century were extraordinary. The international situation brought profound changes—trends towards worldwide polarization, globalization of the economy, and the information network. Our internal reform has intensified and expanded. Our enterprise in building socialism with Chinese characteristics has made huge strides and gained valuable experience. In our religious work, the third generation of collective leadership of the Party Central Committee, with Comrade Jiang Zemin as the core, continues to support the fundamentally correct religious policy, established by the collective leadership of the first and second generations. We keep in mind new changes in the world scene as well as new trends in our reform movement. We take a broad and long-term view of the whole situation discerning the times and circumstances in order to link the Marxist view of religion to the elemental phase of the religious question in our socialist system. We conducted a series of important discussions on religion, and religious work, and made decisions and disposition of the matter so that religious believers and those who do not believe in religion would unite their best efforts to establish the glorious enterprise of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

The Party's third generation collective leadership gives high priority to religious work.

First, we emphasized that leadership cadres at all levels of the Party must pay serious attention to the religious question, firmly establish the Marxist view of religion, take pains to maintain the stability and continuity of religious policy, and strengthen and develop a patriotic united front with religious people. The Party's

Central Committee, which has Comrade Jiang Zemin as the core, has frequently emphasized the need of carefully dealing with the religious question. It is one of the important issues in establishing our socialist enterprise, and of major concern in setting up socialism with Chinese characteristics. Each level of the Party's leadership, especially its highest leadership, must firmly establish the Marxist view of religion, fully recognize the long-term nature of the religious question as well as the complexity and importance of religious work. They must become more competent in dealing with the complexities of the religious question. Comrade Jiang Zemin emphasizes that communists must learn to master historical materialism and become committed atheists. They must be determined to educate the masses in the Marxist concept of religion and firmly implement the Party's policy on religion, and carry out religious work according to law. At the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties, Comrade Jiang Zemin, facing a series of major changes within China and in the international arena, pointed out that religion would continue to exist for some time during the period of socialism, and that the policy of freedom of religious belief would not be changed. The policy's stability and continuity had to be maintained. In 1991, Comrade Jiang Zemin advanced the principle of the Party in maintaining relationships with friends in religious circles. It was "political unity and cooperation, mutual respect in matters of faith." This was a new development in the Party's theory on the United Front and won the wholehearted approbation of religious authorities and the large mass of believers. In 1993, Comrade Jiang Zemin dealing with religious matters proposed his "Three Words." Again in 1999 at the Central Committee's Ethnic Working Conference he restated these "Three Words." They were: "Fully and correctly implement the Party's policy on the freedom of religious belief; strengthen supervision over religious matters according to law; actively guide religion's adaptation to the socialist society." These "Three Words" established for us a new basic principle on religious work, against the historical setting, pointing to a new understanding that religious work will take.

Second, we emphasized strengthening supervision over religious matters according to law, while correctly differentiating, and dealing with the two types of dissimilar contradictions that appear in religion. In 1991, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council sent out a Circular entitled "Some Problems Concerning Further Improving Works on Religion"

This followed the 1982 publication of the Central Committee's document "The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period." This was another important document directing religious work during the first phase of socialism in China. It was the first document that clearly proposed carrying out supervision over religious matters according to law. According to Article 36 of the Constitution, in 1994, the State Council published "Regulations regarding the Management of Places for Religious Activity" and "Regulations on the Supervision of the Religious Activities of Foreigners in China." These documents indicated that our country began to adopt a legal system regarding supervision over religious matters. Under the leadership of the Central Committee, each level of government began to strengthen supervision over religious activities according to law. This produced evident results. The Central Committee also pointed out that a careful implementation of religious work and correctly dealing with the two types of contradictions that appear in religion would have a very important and unequivocal meaning for safeguarding social stability, improving ethnic union, promoting national unity and the building up of the socialist modern enterprise. Comrade Jiang Zemin often emphasized that there are no small matters when dealing with ethnicity and religion. One must deal with religious problems conscientiously; they must not be treated lightly. All must be highly vigilant, nip evil in the bud, take all precautions, and above all, maintain a clear head and sound mind when dealing with those who deliberately use religion to destroy order and unity, and commit the evil of creating division among peoples of different ethnic groups. Comrade Li Ruihuan states that in our country everybody, every group of persons, and this, of course, includes religious bodies, must protect the sanctity of the law, the welfare of the people, ethnic union and national unity. In recent years, under the correct leadership of the Central Committee, the mass incident caused by contradictions within the Islamic denominations in the Northwest was skillfully settled. Owing to a single publication that insulted a minority ethnic group and harmed their religious sensitivities, the mass of Muslims rose up in protest. This incident taught us how to unite the mass of people, to isolate and attack a small number of malcontents who broke the law. We gained much useful experience in dealing with mass incidents, and sudden situations caused by religious problems in the new circumstances.

Third, we emphasized a full respect for the religious beliefs of ethnic minorities, firmly prevent and oppose enemy forces whether domestic or foreign from using religion to carry out activities that divide the people. At the same time we must safeguard the stability of the border areas where ethnic minorities live. Because of hostile schemes from the West that use religion to divide ethnic peoples living in the border areas of Xinjiang and Tibet, Comrade Jiang Zemin has often emphasized the need to improve the unity and basic rights of these peoples, their rapid economic development, and improvement of their lives. We must guard against those who use religion to divide people, as well as against words or activities that destroy ethnic union. We must take strict precautions against foreigners or nationals who wish to split ethnic unity as well as religious fanatics who use religion to destroy national unity. President Jiang has often gone on inspection tours to Xinjiang, Tibet, Qinghai, Gansu, Ningxia, Guangxi, and Yunnan provinces, overseeing work, making important speeches, and exhorting all Party members to place special emphasis on ethnic and religious work. In July of 1994, the Central Committee held the Third Tibetan Symposium creating the formula "The Central Party cares for Tibet, the whole nation supports Tibet." This gave strong impetus to the economic and social development of Tibet. In 1995, we successfully completed, in accordance with strict religious procedure and historical precedent, the investiture of the 11th Panchen Lama and exposed the true face of the Dalai Lama's clique that brought disaster to Tibet, the Buddhist religion and the nation. This was a great victory in the struggle with the Dalai Lama clique that centered on the question of the reincarnation of the new Panchen Lama. Following upon this victory, patriotic education was established in the Buddhist temples in Tibet, protection given to the proper transmission of Tibetan Buddhism, normal religious activities safeguarded, and progress made in stabilizing Tibetan society. The central government also carried out many important directives and dispositions for religious work among the minority peoples in the Xinjiang frontier. While normal religious activities of ethnic peoples were protected by law the government also took a clear-cut stand against ethnic splittists and fanatic religious forces. Thus they were effective in safeguarding ethnic unity and social stability in the frontier areas, as well as protecting the right to freedom of religious belief of ethnic minorities.

Fourth, we emphasized the progress made in being more open, and encouraged religious persons to implement friendly relations with foreigners. At the same time, however, we firmly resisted foreign forces hostile to China from using religion to infiltrate our country. Leaders in the central government have often met with religious friends from abroad and have encouraged and supported religious persons who established friendly relations with foreigners. At the same time they have warned religious persons to pay very special attention to foreign forces hostile to China lest they intensify efforts to use ethnic and religious questions to infiltrate our country. Religious persons in China have already established relations with religious persons from a hundred or more countries and areas. They deal with each other on an equal footing, affirming the principle of the autonomous and independent management of religion.

A whole series of important discussions, policies, and dispositions emanating from the third generation of the Party's collective leadership on the religious question and on religious work have been long tested and proven to be entirely correct. Each Party committee and the government have generally strengthened and improved their religious work, and appropriately dealt with ever increasingly complex religious questions arising from new situations both within and outside the country. In some places in the world today various ethnic groups, religions, and territorial matters are repeatedly inciting contradictions and turbulent situations. China is a large country with many ethnic groups and religions; it must maintain ethnic harmony, religious stability, and social peace. There is no one that does not firmly realize that ethnic groups must not lose harmony, religious bodies must not oppose each other, society must not be destabilized, and the country must not be divided.

Firmly grasp the Party's basic concept of and policy on religion during this first stage of socialism.

Through strong leadership in religious work and detailed concrete directives, our Party has in practice closely linked the Marxist concept on religion with the religious question as it exists in China during this first stage of socialism. It has created a scientific and systematic concept and basic policy on religion. Some examples are:

- (1) Religion is in a process of rising, developing and vanishing.

Religion will exist for a long time in socialist society. To face and deal with the religious question correctly is an important component in the building of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Administrative force cannot be used to destroy or to develop religion.

- (2) Citizens have the right to freedom of religious belief, as well as the right to disbelieve in religion. The right of citizens to freedom of religious belief is guaranteed by the Constitution and the Law. No government agency, social body, or individual can coerce a citizen to believe in religion or disbelieve in it, or discriminate against citizens who believe in religion or those who disbelieve in it.
- (3) The difference that exists between atheists and religious believers on matters of belief should not be so overly emphasized as to ignore or write off their basic unity in enjoying political and economic benefits. All must insist on political unity and cooperation, mutual respect for religious beliefs so that the mass of believers and unbelievers can unite in cooperation towards building the glorious enterprise of socialism with Chinese characteristics.
- (4) The contradictions caused by religion in our country are mainly internal ones that exist within the people. However in certain conditions and circumstances they can become confrontational. In dealing with these questions, one must insist on the protection of personal rights, respect for the law, ethnic unity, and national union.
- (5) Religious activities must be carried out within the law and government policy. The government must exercise supervision over religion according to law, protect normal religious activities, suppress and crack down on illegal and criminal activities carried out in the name of religion. No one is allowed to use religion to disrupt social order, harm public health, obstruct the system of public education, nor to interfere with the courts, public administration and education.
- (6) One must become skillful in observing differences and connections between ethnic and religious questions. In dealing with religious questions, one must pay attention to the basic rights of ethnic groups, their unity and progress. One must be on guard to oppose words or deeds that use religion to divide people or destroy ethnic unity.

- (7) Firmly support the principle of the autonomous and independent management of the church, and oppose foreign forces interfering in religious matters or wanting to control religious bodies within our country. Develop relationships with foreign religious bodies on an equal and friendly basis, while suppressing hostile foreign forces using religion to infiltrate our country.
- (8) Win over, unite, and educate religious persons, encouraging them to love their country and their church and to unite for progress. Carefully plan the training of young patriotic religious personnel, enabling them to fully develop the function of patriotic religious associations.
- (9) Encourage and support each religion to develop its active potential in adapting to socialism.
- (10) Implement education in a scientific worldview of dialectical and historical materialism (including atheism) among the masses, especially the large mass of young people. Spread scientific knowledge, and raise the standards of ethical morality and scientific culture.

To summarize the content of the above points, we have the succinct “Three Words” of Comrade Jiang Zemin. They are: (1) carry out the Party’s policy on freedom of religious belief in a full and correct manner; (2) strengthen supervision over religious matters according to law; (3) actively guide religion to adapt to a socialist society. In a word, this is to emphasize policy, grasp management, and promote adaptation.

Emphasizing policy, grasping policy, and promoting adaptation manifest one principle. This is to implement the Party’s policy on the freedom of religious belief in a full and correct manner. These words project one important point—this is to exercise supervision of religious matters according to law as we face existing problems in religion today. These words have one aim—it is actively to lead religion in adapting to a socialist society.

Emphasize policy, grasp management, promote adaptation, and improve performance of religious work

At this turn of the century, we face a surge of various ideological cultures. We frequently run into local conflicts and social disturbances caused by ethnic, religious and territorial elements.

When we enter the WTO, we shall be opening to outside influences on many levels. Foreign and local hostile forces use religion to infiltrate all levels of society and create divisions that challenge us. We face society undergoing economic transformation meeting new situations and ideological problems. We encounter the complex situation of religion that, at this early stage of socialism, not only continues to exist but is also making further progress. Therefore we must earnestly grasp what is fundamental and firmly hold to what is fundamental in order to deal with religion in a correct way. We must emphasize policy, this is to say that we must fully and correctly implement the Party's policy of freedom of religious belief. We must manage supervision; this is to strengthen our supervision over religious matters according to law. We must promote adaptation; this is to guide religion in adapting to a socialist society. These are the fundamentals we must hold to in dealing with religious work in this new era.

1. We must correctly and fully implement the Party's policy on the freedom of religious faith.

For the present, we must clearly know the "*two natures—one process*" theory of dealing with the religious question at this early stage of socialism, in order to correctly understand and fully implement the Party's policy on the freedom of religious faith.

We must recognize the long-term *nature* of religion. To know its long term nature is to recognize its inner regularity. In our country, which is a developing country relatively backward economically and culturally, we must fully use our political strength as a socialist State to actively deal with the religious question. We must persevere and take pains to prepare ourselves ideologically, thoroughly, and profoundly for this task. According to the Marxist view of religion, we should consistently direct our efforts to raise our economic and scientific culture that creates the foundation for a materialist culture. This will be the first step in the natural disappearance of religion. For religion will as a matter of course disappear but the process will last for a long time. Since religion will continue to exist for a long time, at this stage of socialism we must seriously deal with and supervise religious matters. We must set correct policies and use correct methods to deal with and resolve religious questions. We must not consider the religious question to be of little importance and thus

deal with it in a slovenly manner. Neither should we overstate the seriousness of the religious question as people opposing each other. We must be tactful in incorporating the present work with our long-term aim. We must set the direction, base ourselves on reality, and carry out the work in a solid way according to the Party's aim and policies.

We must understand the *nature* of stages, emphasize direction, and not neglect the long-term historical process of religion's disappearance, nor overlook each concrete stage in this long-term historical process. We must not act with undue haste and leap over the stages (of the historical process). Neither must we avoid acting when we should or be fearful of going ahead. The history of our revolution teaches us over and over again that our problem and error is, for the most part, blind action that demands quick results. Impatience necessarily results in carelessness and perfunctory decisions. Such carelessness also necessarily results in extreme measures, over-rated opinions, unnecessary complexities, and constant vacillation. A fit of impatience or a moment of laxness creates many loopholes that will open up a whole bag of worms causing untold trouble for those that follow. What is required is patience and vigilance, especially patience. Yet in some places and in some work environments what is important is not to be lax.

We must grasp the objective *process*. Starting from religious reality at this first stage of socialism, we must realize that religious work is a difficult and complex process. Religion today is one that is undergoing a process of social reform and development. Problems appear during this process and can only be solved during the process. We must place religion within the process of social reform and look at it from the process of development. This is to say, in our premise of establishing the economy as of central importance, there is a process to solving the soft and hard problems. In intensifying reform, as the socialist market economy is being set up, there is a process for formulating common ideals, value judgments, and moral standards useful for building modern socialism. In the situation of opening up to reform, dealing with the complex religious question also needs a process. Since implementing religious policy is of primary importance, strengthening a lawful supervision over religious matters also has its process. Since religion is "a religion of processes" we cannot consider the problem as fixed for all time, for everything is in

flux. This means that we cannot look at the question from a simplistic viewpoint, since many elements are intimately linked to each other. We have to look at the whole complex of our religious work and see it as process, then we cannot demand too much and grow overly impatient, nor can we just let matters slide without taking any action. At present the main task is to safeguard stability and unity and to take as our chief aim the implementing of this stability and unity. Furthermore, in dealing with the important points, the difficulties, and crises of matters pertaining to religion, we have to organize an overall unified approach.

We must be clear that “*two natures—one process*” is helpful for us to understand our Party’s policy on the freedom of religious belief and a indispensable outcome of dialectical materialism. This principle is the result of long and careful thought. It is not insignificant; it goes to the root of the matter. It should not be set aside, but put into practice. It is not a passing fad; it will be around for a long time.

2. Strengthen our supervision of religious matters according to law

The State Council asks that during this year each bureau and department of the State Council give priority to strengthening management practices. Our Religious Affairs Bureau must make more efforts to strengthen our supervision of religious affairs.

We must have a clear and accurate idea of what constitutes the essence of religious affairs. Religion is regarded as an ideology, a private affair (but for Communists is it not a private affair). As a social phenomenon, it cannot but become an object for social concern. As a social entity, religion must fall under social management. We speak of religion as a social entity because it has a social organization (religious bodies) and a social structure (temples, churches). It carries out social activities (where large numbers of believers take part in religious or other activities). It also necessarily creates various types of relationships with other social entities within the society. This will result in various social activities. In other words, when we speak of religious affairs, we are referring, especially, to these social activities. It is religion understood precisely as a social entity that creates all kinds of relationships, actions and activities touching upon the public welfare. This is what the executive agencies of the government must supervise.

We must deal with supervising religious affairs without interfering in the internal relationships of religious organizations. Religious affairs are one kind of public affairs in the social realm. Since these have their own specific religious characteristics, they are necessarily linked to the internal affairs of religious organizations. However religious affairs also have a public and social nature and this differs from the internal affairs of religious organizations. The key to judging religious affairs is to examine whether they have a public social character. To measure the extent of their social character is to weigh the degree of their influence on the public welfare. Implementing supervision of religious affairs is not the same as meddling in the internal affairs of religious organizations. The norm for judging between “religious affairs” and the “internal affairs of religious organizations” is clear and precise, but defining their limits can only be relative. To gain the understanding and support of religious personnel is the key to dealing with the relationship between the two, our supervision and administering religious affairs according to law.

According to the legal requirements, managing state affairs as well as religious affairs is essentially the social duty of all citizens (including religious believers). They must follow the Party’s leadership and act according to the Constitution and legal stipulations, as well as use all ways and means to supervise the one aspect that touches upon the welfare of society. “Supervision” must include the mass viewpoint and a consciousness that one is serving the community, and above all, it must include unity. Cadres working in the Religious Affairs Bureau must be glad to work with the masses and be skilled in doing so, serving the mass of religious personnel and believers with ardor, and safeguarding their legal rights.

We must correctly deal with disturbances caused by religious questions. These disturbances are often made up of non-antagonistic as well as antagonistic contradictions. It is the masses who cannot distinguish reality and evil people with ulterior motives. We must not be led astray by the fact that the problem appears as a religious one, or get entangled in the complexities of various religious elements, much less make an already dangerous situation worse than it already is. We must distinguish between the large majority of religious believers from the small minority of evil perpetrators. We must dig deeper into the disturbance to discover its source, understand more thoroughly its linkage with the religious question, and become more

familiar with the actual problems that concern the mass of religious believers. We must show how hostile forces use religion to incite the religious masses by digging out the roots of unstable but well hidden elements. We must move forward in setting up a legal system for religion, as well as strengthening a team of cadres to work on religion. We must emphasize the way to succeed in setting up such a legal system as well as enhancing the quality of legislation. If we support the Party's leadership we will make ample, gradual, and well-planned preparations to implement a positive set of principles that will establish a religious legal system for the entire country and each province. At present we must pay attention to setting up administrative laws and regulations as well as local legislation. We must also pay close attention to know how to formulate necessary regulations for our bureaus. We must also pay strict attention to the work of enforcing and expanding laws. At the same time we must continue to elaborate policies that act as guidelines for religious work. We must attach importance to the study of policy, support basic policies, and implement specific policies.

We must lay stress on building up organizational teams of cadres to deal with religious work. These teams are essential for closer supervision of religious affairs. We must train the needed personnel, insure necessary finances, and enhance the political and professional quality of cadres. This will enable our government Religious Affairs Bureaus to become a valuable asset in strengthening the Party's leadership by being an authoritative administration, a crack team of experts, interacting in close harmony according to set patterns, a high-principled and disciplined administrative and management system.

3. Actively guide religion to adapt to socialist society

We must guide religion to adapt to socialist society. This is a big issue that needs continual evaluation during implementation. We must now lay special emphasis on the following three principles.

1. Benefit society:

In guiding religion to adapt to socialist society the most fundamental requirement is to include religious activities within the scope of the Constitution and law. This makes it possible for religion to live in peace with society, and able to carry out what the law requires: "to be useful to society and offer service to the masses." We

must actively and fully develop the patriotic tradition among religious personnel in China, encourage these people along with their religious organizations to use their influence to adapt their religious activities so that they conform to and serve the greatest good of their country and all its citizens. They must lead their believers to be patriotic and observe the law, repress evil and do good, serve society, work for national and ethnic unity, as well as make useful contributions to the development of society.

2. Consolidate results.

After the new China was established, religious bodies in China carried out an institutional reform. Catholics and Protestants broke off from all imperialistic designs and control in order to implement an independent and autonomous management of their own affairs. Buddhists, Daoists, and Muslims got rid of all feudalistic oppression and repressive systems. This enabled all these religions to make great strides in adapting to a socialist society. We must guide religious people to consolidate the results of their learnings: to adapt to new situations and obligations called for by the modernization of our socialist enterprise. They must continue to make progress and explore new roads to meet the demands that these situations and obligations create in our socialist enterprise. We must continue to encourage and support Catholics in their maintaining an independent and autonomous administration of the Church, promoting a democratic governing of their religious affairs. We must encourage and support Protestants to maintain the principle of the "Three Selves", promoting the establishment of a theological ideology. We must encourage and support Buddhists, Daoists, and Muslims to wipe away the last vestiges of the old society that was permeated by feudalistic elements. We must raise the level of their faith, strengthen their culture, morality and philosophical tendencies. We must carefully observe the differences as well as the relations between religion's questions and ethnic questions. We must firmly oppose extremist religious forces, and be highly alert to combat ethnic divisive forces, whether domestic or foreign, that under the guise of religion, operate to divide our country. We must guide the masses of religious people to actively work for the common welfare and common prosperity of all our ethnic people.

3. Take new steps.

We must undertake a serious study of religious culture to

explore and respect valuable elements found in it. With the almost daily tremendous progress made by humankind, religion will gradually come to assimilate some elements from secular morality and rationality, putting aside its extremism and fanaticism, and gradually accommodating with and adapting to modern society. This cannot but influence the reform of its religious ideology and system.

We firmly believe that in this new century, all we need to do is follow the lead of Deng Xiaoping Thought, keep on integrating Marxist teaching on religion with the situation of religion in China, and fully implement the systematic and important guidelines as well as the general and specific policies concerning religious work of the Communist Party Central Committee, with Comrade Jiang Zemin at the core of Party leadership. We must firmly continue to emphasize policy, strengthen management, promote adaptation, improve performance of religious work, maintain what is fundamental, see to the overall situation, and hold on to what is important. By doing this we can definitely handle new religious situations, new problems, and open up a new phase in our religious work.



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