

Documents

Supervision of Christianity in the People's Republic of China

Early in 1982 the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party issued an important internal circular setting out its definitive religious policy. This circular, known as "Document 19", gave authoritative guidelines for the control of religious affairs in the context of the CCP's "United Front Work" policy. According to this, religious believers in China are to be supervised by "patriotic" clergy who themselves are responsible to the relevant government organs, in particular, the United Front Work Department and the Religious Affairs Bureau, which are staffed by communist cadres. The CCP further delineated the bounds of "normal" religious activities which are tolerated by the state: evangelism of young people under 18 was forbidden, as was itinerant evangelism and the dissemination of unofficial religious literature. Unofficial Christian meetings based in the home, which between 1966 and 1979 had been the only means by which Christians could meet for worship, were "in principle not permitted" but were "not to be rigidly prohibited". Instead, "patriotic" religious workers were to make

other suitable arrangements for religious believers.

Since 1979, the officially-approved Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and its sister organisation, the China Christian Council (CCC) (set up in 1980) have reopened more than 4,000 church buildings. They have also made efforts to control the greater number of already existing house-churches. In some cases they have merged existing groups; in others, they have established their own "meeting points" (juhuidian). Some Christians wish to remain independent of TSPM/CCC supervision and this has led to tensions. At the time of writing (late 1986), the church scene in China presents considerable diversity.

Internal documents showing how the religious policy is being implemented at the provincial, or local level are not easily obtained. However, some have been received in Hong Kong and give useful information. Three are reproduced below.

The first is a provincial document from Yunnan Province in south-west China, dated May 1982. It is, according to other evidence received,

probably fairly typical of the internal regulations promulgated by the TSPM/CCC at the provincial level. The second contains extracts from a speech given by the Head of the Religious Affairs Bureau in Guangxi province to TSPA/CCC leaders in March 1984, and reveals something of the relationship which exists between the churches and party organs at the local level. The third is a county-level document from East China which confirms many verbal reports that when the TSPM/CCC reopen church buildings officially, pressure is often placed on existing

house-churches to cease their activities. Although most house-church leaders arrested in 1982-83 have now been released, according to one recent report there are still 39 house-church leaders in prison in one county of Henan Province. This, together with the fact that during 1986 Roman Catholic seminarists loyal to the Vatican were beaten and arrested in Hebei Province (as reported by Amnesty International on 30 September 1986), shows that, despite overall improvement in the situation, religious freedom in China remains limited.

Yunnan Province Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee/
Yunnan Province Christian Council.

Decisions regarding the safeguarding of normal religious activity (adopted on 29 March 1982).

The Chinese Christian Church is the independent church of China which practises self-government, self-support, and self-propagation. In order to strengthen and develop the achievements of these "Three-Self" principles, to promote a patriotic and law-abiding spirit, and to fully implement the [Communist] Party's policy of religious freedom, the Standing Committees of the Yunnan Province Christian Council have discussed, and then agreed upon, the following decisions:

1. The Christian church in our province implemented unity in 1958. The names of the churches in each locality were changed into a united form, thus: "X Christian X Church". For example, there were the "Kunming City Christian Zion Church", and the "Wuding County Christian Changchong Church". We hope that all brothers and sisters in the Lord will worship, serve and glorify God in unity under the

guidance of the Holy Spirit.

2. All churches which have obtained government approval to carry out religious activities must uphold the "Three-Self" principles, and in accordance with local conditions take three decisions: a) fix the field of operation (local area for the preacher's ministry); b) fix the place (for the church); c) decide on the people (appoint the responsible people).

3. Each church ought to elect from among the believers three to five people who uphold the "Three-Self" principles, are orthodox in faith, upright in character, and law-abiding, and who are capable of holding responsibility for church work. They will form a management group to draw up a management contract, and together be responsible for the work of the church. All ministerial and religious activities of each church should be conducted inside the church building. Religious activities must not obstruct public order, or interfere with orderly work and production; they must not apportion money or grain, or use the collective property of the commune or brigade.

4. All persons who are not ordained, but are already engaged in ministerial

activity must obtain the recommendation of the management group of an existing church and report to the local Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement and China Council Committees to be vetted. Only those who qualify and are then ordained to the ministry can undertake ministerial activities.

5. Each minister should undertake ministerial work in the church for which he is responsible, and not over-step his territory, so as to avoid causing confusion; he also must not welcome outsiders or arrange for outsiders to come and conduct religious activities in the church. Religious activities must not interfere with government, culture, education, the law, marriage, or birth-control.

6. Ministers must proclaim the word of the Lord according to the "Bible". In speech and conduct they should be patriotic, love the faith, glorify God and benefit others. They should oppose those who use preaching the Gospel to spread heresies, or who attack by innuendo and spread fallacies to deceive people. They should not allow people to prevent the sick from getting medical treatment, nor allow the exorcism of demons, or any practices which harm the people's health. It is forbidden, under the name of religious activities, to engage in illegal activities such as swindling and cheating people out of their money.

7. It is forbidden to make converts among young people who are under age. If adults wish to become Christians, they can receive baptism and be accepted into the church only if they have qualified by going through the stages of "friendly observer", "proselyte" and "catechumen".

8. All ministers who have been sentenced or stripped of their political rights for breaking state laws also lose their ministerial position. When they have served their sentence and been released, if they wish to be

restored to the ministry, this must be investigated and decided by the local committees of the Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement and Christian Council.

9. The work of evangelism of the China Christian Church is the responsibility and jurisdiction of the Chinese Church. In no circumstances do we permit foreign, Hong Kong or Macao churches or individuals (whatever their colour or race) to interfere in our church, or to seek to control it, to conduct evangelistic activities within our borders or disseminate religious publications or religious propaganda. If such a situation is discovered, then it should be stopped, and reported to the government.

10. Christians throughout the entire province must uphold the Four Basic Principles* and abide by the policies and laws of the state, observe the policy of freedom of religious belief, mutually respect their compatriots who are not Christians living together in harmony, and together, under the leadership of the government, channel their efforts into fulfilling the "Four Modernisations".

All who transgress the above decisions should undergo re-education, and if, after re-education, they have not changed their ways, the relevant department of the government** can be requested to deal with them.

The above translation was kindly supplied by Christian Communications Ltd., Hong Kong.

Translator's notes:

*The "Four Basic Principles" are: 1) to uphold the socialist road; 2) to uphold the people's democratic dictatorship; 3) to uphold Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought; 4) to uphold the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.

**This is a clear reference to the Public Security Bureau.

Conference of the Standing Committees of the [Guangxi] Autonomous Region Three Self/Christian Council (Preparatory Committee). Speech of the Head of the Religious Affairs Bureau, Lan Zhiren, 22 March 1984, to the Conference. [Extracts]

[. . .] The second question I wish to talk about relates to some of the problems concerning the church.

1. What are the responsibilities of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement [TSPM]? According to the regulations set out in Document 19 of the Central Committee* the basic tasks of the TSPM at every level are:

- a) to assist the party and government thoroughly to implement the policy of freedom of religious belief;
- b) to help the broad masses of religious believers and religious leaders to raise ever higher [the level of] their patriotic and socialist consciousness;
- c) to represent the legitimate rights of religious circles;
- d) to organise normal religious activities;
- e) to carry out church work effectively.

In the implementation of these tasks you must accept the leadership of the party and government. Of course, party and government cadres should support and help each religious organisation to resolve its own problems, and not usurp their place. When these tasks have been clearly understood, the correct method of organising church work, based on these "Five Basic Points" should be clear. Of course, as the

*Translator's note: this is important documentary evidence that "Document 19" of the Central Committee, which laid down the definitive religious policy in March 1982, was actually transmitted to the provincial and local levels.

situation differs in every location, certain points will have to be emphasised, but it is necessary to understand the overall basic tasks. In this way you will be able to carry out the work well and develop your organisation effectively, doing useful work within the constitutional and legal framework, so that the patriotic church may become a religious body with truly positive influence, and a means by which the party and government may win over, unite, and educate religious people.

2. Now I wish to discuss questions concerning the relationship between the [Guangxi] Autonomous Region [AR] Three-Self Movement and the churches at municipal and county level.

The relationship between the Autonomous Region's [i.e. provincial — *Ed.*] TSPM and the municipal and county TSPMs is not one of direct vertical leadership. Rather, it is a mutual relationship in which experiences are exchanged. The AR TSPM's work-plans can be passed on to city and county TSPMs and churches for study. When a united approach is needed, matters can be discussed and decisions taken by all members. City and county TSPM and church-work plans should be based on local circumstances and put forward after obtaining the views of the relevant local government departments. Thus when the AR TSPM pastors discuss helping the work of city and county-level TSPMs and churches, should any problems arise in the work, you may exchange opinions and discuss what to do, in the light of the particular situation. But the local church should take the decision; you can only assist. Again, the relationship between city and county [rural — *Ed.*] churches is not one of leading and of being led, but one of equality. Problems should be solved on the basis of practical experience. They can only be solved

by the local church relying on the local government. For instance, there is the problem of new converts who want to be baptised. Who should be baptised? This is decided at the local church level. You do not know the circumstances of people's faith (at the local level). Or again, there is the need to solve the question of meeting-points. This is decided by the local government, and their decision is based on actual local conditions. You are not in a position to decide.

3. There is the problem of how the believing masses can lead their religious life when churches are without pastors. How is this to be resolved?

Some areas have believers, but no pastors. How can they lead their religious life? For example, in Liuzhou City some pastors made a unilateral decision to go to neighbouring counties to make converts. This is in fact illegal. Now, in order to resolve the contradiction of there being insufficient religious personnel when the believing masses ask for religious workers to hold religious services, the relevant religious departments of the municipal and county people's government can discuss churches' requests. Cities and counties with religious personnel can designate certain pastors to go to these local churches for a fixed period to hold services and preach. Other personnel cannot leave their area and undertake evangelism as they please [. . .]

* * * * *

Document of the Religious Affairs Section of the Cixi County People's Government. No. 4, 1984.

Regarding the decision to establish a church in Shengshan Township.
To: The Planning Committee of Shengshan Township Church — an

announcement about the request to establish the Shengshan church.

Based on the relevant provisions of the State Constitution, the following 11 persons are named as the working committee for the church in Shengshan Township. [names given] From now on, all the religious masses should join the church in order to conduct a normal religious life. All meeting-points already spontaneously established in the eastern, western and northern parts of the township, and all other home-meetings in Shengshan township are hereby dissolved. Everyone must go to the Christian Church at Qinyong village, in Shengshan Township, to meet. It is hoped that the church committee, under the leadership of the local Party Committee and government, will arrange religious activities well, without interfering with the social order, production, or the work schedule.

All religious believers should step up their [political] studies, be patriotic and law-abiding, and follow the "Three-Self" patriotic road. They should obey the "Four Basic Principles"* in order to fulfil the general task of the new era, and contribute to this new phase of socialist modernisation and construction.

The Religious Affairs section of the Cixi County People's Government.
17 January 1984.
County Committee United Front Work Department/County Government Office.

*Translations and introduction
by A. P. B. Lambert*

*The "Four Basic Principles" are enumerated in the first translator's note on p. 215.