

On the Socialist View of Religion with Chinese Characteristics
(论中国特色社会主义宗教观)*

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Abstract

This paper formulates conceptually the “socialist view of religion with Chinese characteristics”; furthermore, it analyzes the historical and realistic bases of this formulation, along with the situation of the world upon which such a concept is grounded. Then, it focally discusses why the innovative nucleus of the “socialist view of religion with Chinese characteristics” is the idea of “actively guiding religion to be compatible with socialism” and what the realistic meaning, scientific connotation, effective way, and measurement standard of “to be compatible” is. The fundamental framework of the “socialist view of religion with Chinese characteristics” is, as this paper suggests, contained in two questions—“How will we treat?” and “How will we handle?”—in connection with the practical situation of Chinese religion. Finally, the paper summarizes that this theory is an open system and has global significance from the perspective of the historical development of humankind.

Keywords

Chinese characteristics – socialism – view of religion – active guidance

The Meaning of the Socialist View of Religion with Chinese Characteristics

The guiding ideology of all kinds of work in present-day China is the theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics, which includes the “socialist view

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of religion with Chinese characteristics”—the guide to the work of handling religious questions at the present stage of Chinese socialism. The “socialist view of religion with Chinese characteristics” comprises the Chinese communists’ fundamental idea of, attitude towards, and theories and policies concerning the religious question.

The “socialist view of religion with Chinese characteristics” is a theoretical product that has its origin in Marxist perspectives on religion and keeps abreast of the times.

The revolutionary activities of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were carried out in late nineteenth-century Europe. What they principally contributed to the understanding and handling of religious questions was to provide the working class with a scientific world outlook, the Marxist view of religion included, and the proletarian revolution with a theoretical weapon.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Vladimir Lenin led the revolution in Russia. As far as the religious question is concerned, the achievement of Lenin was that he enriched and developed the Marxist view of religion and mobilized and led the masses of workers and peasants, who were mostly religious believers, to devote themselves to class struggle for the triumph of socialism. They finally won the October Revolution in 1917 and created a socialist country for the first time in the history of the world.

Our attitude to the Marxist view of religion is, above all, to uphold it and then carry it on. Against the background of nineteenth-century Europe and Christian culture, and with an eye to ideology and social politics, the classic writers of Marxism-Leninism employed the idea of class and class struggle and the method of class analysis to explore religion and religious questions at the time. Nevertheless, as for religious questions pertaining to the time when the working class had already come into power and the country had become a socialist society, these writers had no adequate experience, though they did formulate some basic principles of understanding and handling religious questions and make certain scientific predictions. In present-day China, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has transformed itself from the revolutionary party to the governing party and accordingly shifted the Party's task from leading the people to make a revolution to guiding the people to build up China. In these new social, historical conditions, taking the development and change of the society into consideration, it is imperative to combine the fundamentals of Marxist perspectives on religion with the practical situation of handling religious questions at the primary stage of Chinese socialism, to prevent the continuous line between the Marxist fundamentals and Chinese practice from being broken and to keep both abreast of