

WORLD AFFAIRS

China To Christians: We're Rewriting The Bible, And You'll Use It Or Else

Faith is increasingly under attack in President Xi Jinping's China. People around the world should be speaking up in defense of China's persecuted believers.

When a Chinese Christian, Chen Yu, was caught boldly selling religious publications not authorized by the government, his **punishment** was a seven-year prison sentence and an approximately \$30,000 USD fine, handed down by a court last month.

Such steep punishment for promoting and adhering to a religion is all too common in China today. Faith is increasingly under attack in President Xi Jinping's China. As religious expression becomes more dangerous there, people around the world should be speaking up in defense of China's persecuted believers.

In addition to Chen's fine and imprisonment, the court ordered local police in the Zhejiang province to destroy 12,864 religious books from his online bookstore. Make no mistake—this is a regime that is deeply afraid of the growth of Christianity.

The estimated 100 million Christians in China make the eradication of Christianity from China difficult. Chairman Mao tried and was unsuccessful. President Xi prefers a more subtle tactic than Mao's, a campaign to "Sinicize" religion to make it more compatible with the teachings of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

One way China seeks to Sinicize Christianity is by **re-writing** the Bible. A complete communist translation has yet to be revealed. The news of one chapter's government-approved revision left Christians outraged last month.

A textbook for a class on professional ethics and law at the government-run University of Electronic Science and Technology Press quotes the Bible's book of John, chapter eight. In this passage, an adulterous woman is brought to Jesus, and her accusers ask if she should be killed by stoning for her sins.

In every authentically translated version of scripture, Jesus responds, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." These words disperse the angry crowd, and Jesus tells the woman, "Go, and from now on sin no more" (ESV).

The Chinese Communist Party's version takes a different turn. In this telling, the crowd leaves, but Jesus **tells** the woman, "I too am a sinner. But if the law could only be executed by men without blemish, the law would be dead." Then Jesus proceeds to stone the woman.

The Party's distortion of scripture whereby the Savior kills a woman is offensive and defamatory. That the CCP made this change is revealing. The Party's story teaches that forgiveness, an important Christian value is rejected and the law must be obeyed without question. In China, the law is whatever the CCP says.

While China may technically allow Christianity, it only allows a version of Christianity remade in the image of the CCP. These developments, among many others, make this a critical time in the history of religion in China. On Friday, the Vatican officially renewed its controversial deal with Beijing from 2018, making it even more so.

The secret **agreement** between the Vatican and Beijing in 2018 gave the officially atheist Chinese government a role in bishop appointments, while China's burgeoning religious oppression was overlooked. The aim of this deal may be admirable — to unify the Catholic Church in China, long divided between "underground" Catholics loyal to the Holy See and those belonging to the government-approved Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association. Despite the

agreement, however, two years later, conditions have **not improved** for Catholics or any other religious adherents in China.

In September, **reports** surfaced that Chinese authorities tortured a 46-year-old priest in the Fujian province for refusing to join the state-approved Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association. The torture method allegedly included shining a bright light into his eyes for days and repeatedly banging a gong beside his ear. In July, bishops and priests from the unregistered Catholic Diocese of Yujiang, in Jiangxi province, **claimed** that Chinese authorities had prohibited “any pastoral activity,” and several priests were forced to undergo “patriotic” training.

After China lifted COVID-19 lockdown restrictions in June, some Catholic priests were **instructed** that Mass could resume, as long as they preached “patriotism.” Keep in mind “patriotism” in China means loyalty to the CCP. Catholics reluctant to join the state-approved church, which is often influenced by Party-approved teachings, are under more pressure than in previous years.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has urged the Vatican to speak to Beijing about religious freedom in China. During a **speech** in Rome last month, he emphasized the impact a pope, the world’s most influential faith leader, can make, pointing to the example of Pope John Paul II, who “played a pivotal role in igniting the revolution of conscience that brought down the Iron Curtain.” For Catholic human rights activists like **Benedict Rogers**, Pope Francis’ lack of interest in publicly speaking up for believers in China is disappointing.

Christians in China who refuse to bend to the Communist Party’s agenda are under intense pressure. Government restrictions are growing tighter, and China’s capacity to surveil and control its population is unprecedented. As it grows more dangerous for them to express their faith in the face of government crackdowns, it is left to the rest of the world to speak in defense of believers in China.

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