

China Cracks Down and Removes Christian Images

The Chinese Communist Party has made efforts to exercise control of the churches in China, replacing Christian images with pictures of President Xi Jinping.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom released a report on the matter, saying the Chinese government has “implemented the coercive ‘sinicization of religion’ policy, which has fundamentally transformed China’s religious environment.”

According to the report, sinicization, or the subordination of religious groups to the CCP’s agenda, has become the “core driving principle of the government’s management of religious affairs.”

“Government officials have installed CCP loyalists as leading religious figures, altered houses of worship with CCP-approved architecture, integrated CCP propaganda into religious doctrines, and otherwise criminalized non-CCP-backed religious activities, all with the goal to ensure the stability of CCP rule,” the report says.

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The report described the government’s control of religious groups, explaining that the CCP’s United Front Work Department (UFWD) and the State Administration for Religious Affairs manage the five “officially recognized” religions: Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism, and Taoism.

Adherents to these religious groups must register with the government to legally practice, the report says.

The report goes on to describe China's "Five-Year Sinicization Work Plans," which include plans to "emphasize patriotism, loyalty to the CCP and China's political system, and conformity of religious doctrines, sermons, rituals, and architectural styles of places of worship with the CCP's ideological requirements."

Discussing Catholic and Protestant churches, the report says that the CCP has "ordered the removal of crosses from churches" and "replaced images of Jesus Christ or the Virgin Mary with pictures of President Xi." The government has also "required the display of CCP slogans at the entrances of churches, censored religious texts, imposed CCP-approved religious materials, and instructed clergy to preach CCP ideology."

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Due to the state's attempt to control Christianity, "tens of millions of Christians have opted not to join these organizations and instead worship independently," the report says.

China has also installed "CCP-aligned bishops" in Catholic churches. Those who disagree with the government "disappear underground," the report notes. Similarly, Protestants face "repression" for refusing to join state-sponsored groups, leading to the CCP "detaining, arresting, and incarcerating independent Protestant leaders and laypersons."

The report also examined sinicization in Buddhist, Islamic, and Taoist religions, emphasizing that sinicization "entrenches the CCP's control and its vision for the modern Chinese state into every aspect of religious life by forcing groups from the five officially recognized religions to conform their beliefs, activities, expression, attire,

leadership, language, houses of worship, and more to CCP ideology.”

Enforcing sinicization leads to the “systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom and related human rights, including genocide, crimes against humanity, mass incarceration, enforced disappearances, and the destruction of cultural and religious heritage,” the report concludes.

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