

The Crackdown on Christians Is Growing

The big crackdown against Christians and their churches in China may be getting worse. Government workers are forcibly removing more and more crosses from church buildings.

This time, however, it's not underground churches experiencing this latest wave of persecution. The latest crackdown is against government-sanctioned churches and their crosses.

Recently, another cross was forcibly removed in China's Zhejiang province—this one by government workers at lower Dafei Catholic Church in Wenzhou. Parishioners sang Christian hymns as their church cross came down.

“(The) cross is in our hearts. The demolition is impossible to bear,” one parishioner named Chen lamented.

The parishioners say they are good Chinese citizens.

“Why do they not let us believe?” Chen asked. “Have we ever opposed the government?”

Although the government insists there is religious freedom in China, Christians believe the tearing down of crosses—now more than 1,500, mostly in Zhejiang, China—proves otherwise.

Tu Shouzhe is a senior member of Muyang Protestant Church, also in Wenzhou. He says public security police entered his church complex by “cutting the lock off a gate.”

“They came in to demolish the cross without any agreement from our church. They just did it,” he said.

The latest church cross removals follow the arrest and interrogation last month of more than 200 human rights lawyers

and advocates. Many have represented Christians in court.

Bob Fu is president of China Aid, a Texas-based group that monitors Christian persecution and human rights violations in China.

“It reflects the top political leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, especially even President Xi Jinping. They are increasingly nervous about the political and economic instability and insecurity,” Fu said.

Christians are now risking possible arrest by resisting the government’s cross removal efforts.

Some are strapping themselves to crosses to prevent removal; others are even standing atop their churches, surrounding the steeples to prevent cranes from operating.

Even a prominent Chinese Catholic bishop, Zhu Weifang, issued an unprecedented public rebuke of the government’s cross removal campaign.

In a strongly worded letter, he and two dozen other Catholic officials urged parishioners to “fight by law of reason to defend our very basic right to our religion.”

Some are making small, replacement crosses—painting them red, and placing them at their homes and along roadways in protest.

Next month, China’s President Xi Jinping is scheduled to visit Washington for an official state visit with President Barack Obama. Congressman Chris Smith, R-Ohio, says the White House should reconsider giving Xi the red carpet treatment...

“We must ask if this summit should even take place. There are many issues in the relationship that needs attention, but does President Xi Jianping’s bold disregard for human rights and his brutal suppression of dissent; does he deserve to get the red-carpet treatment in Washington?” Smith asked.

The crackdown may not end anytime soon regardless of outside criticism.

“This is basically a political campaign targeting these Christian churches with one purpose—according to a secret document we have seen—is called to contain the so-called overheated growth of Christianity,” Fu explained.

Christians say rather than causing the spread of Christianity to diminish, the cross crackdown will likely cause more church growth. Consequently, the Chinese government may actually be creating the very situation it is hoping to avoid.