

THE SINO- VATICAN AGREEMENT



“The CCP only allows religious organizations to exist because they serve, in effect, as an extension of the Party. The directive says that any religious group that does not teach socialism and the Party line, and does not teach its members to love the Party and socialism is a ‘backward’ religion engaged in ‘illegal religious activities,’ and is to be stamped out.”

—STEVEN W MOSHER, *PRI* PRESIDENT

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CONTENTS

3

I: THE ROAD LEADING TO THE SINO-VATICAN AGREEMENT

The First Blunder

The Road Leading to the Sino-Vatican Agreement

7

II: THE SINO-VATICAN AGREEMENT

The Sino-Vatican Agreement

How We Got Here: Vatican-China Relations

The Bishops and Other Chess Pieces

12

III: THE EFFECT OF THE AGREEMENT

Bishop Guo: Faithful Bishop To God, Enemy Of The Red Empire

Xi Jinping's Enforcers: The United Front

Department Of The Chinese Communist Party

A Cry From The East

Conclusion



THE ROAD LEADING TO THE SINO- VATICAN AGREEMENT

IS THIS LEADING TO THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CHINA?

Not long after I entered the Catholic Church in the early nineties, I traveled to China to learn more about the fate of my fellow believers under communism.

They were divided into two opposing camps, or so I believed at the time, with some belonging to the state-controlled church—the so-called Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association—while others belonged to the Catholic Church in communion with Rome. The “underground church,” as we referred to it, given that it was operating outside the purview of the authorities.

Truth be told, I did not think much of those who attended the “Patriotic churches.” I believed that these were small-“c”-Catholics who had compromised with, or entirely capitulated to, the Chinese Communist Party’s demands to sever ties

with the Universal Church and its head, the bishop of Rome.

My sympathy was reserved for the Catholics of the Underground Church. These were bishops, priests, and lay Catholics who had courageously refused the party’s demands to break with Rome in 1958. Instead, they had gone into the catacombs, risking arrest, imprisonment, torture, and sometimes even death to remain faithful. Led over the decades by brave bishops secretly ordained by the pope, these Catholics had endured decades of persecution while remaining.

In short, I believed that the members of the Underground Church were heroic, while the pewsitters in the Patriotic Church were more or less craven.

Monsignor Nonini, the unofficial emissary of the Vatican to China who lived and worked in Hong Kong, was in close contact with the bishops of both the Underground and the Patriotic churches.



He had a surprising—and much more encouraging—story to tell about their relationship with each other, and with Rome.

As far as the Patriotic church was concerned, Msgr. Nonini surprised me by saying, one hundred percent of the laity, and nearly all its priests and bishops, had remained loyal to the Magisterium. “Nearly all the illicitly ordained bishops have asked the Holy Father to be recognized as legitimate,” he told me. “And nearly all, after we examine their character and behavior, have been so recognized. The only exceptions are the Patriotic bishops of Beijing, Shanghai, and a couple of other major cities. They have made too many compromises.”

He summed up by saying, “The Church is more unified now than at any time since the Communist Revolution. Churches are being rebuilt, and seminaries are being reopened. Although it may appear from the

outside that there are still two churches in China, inside of China, there is only one.”

I was overjoyed to learn that the Underground Church was increasingly able to come out of the catacombs and was, in many parts of China, openly preaching the Gospel and making converts. Even more surprising to me was that the Patriotic church, which had begun as a communist front organization intended to co-opt and gradually extinguish Catholicism throughout China, had been transformed from within by faithful Catholics who saw themselves as part of the Universal Church.

The newfound unity of Catholics in China that Msgr. Nonini described to me had nothing to do with either political pressure from the party or political overtures to Beijing by Vatican diplomats. It had come about from the bottom up, not from the top down.

It was not a perfect solution—some of the deep wounds of decades of politically fomented division remained—but it was a workable one. It had, after all, been worked out at the parish and diocesan levels by the real stakeholders—Chinese Catholics themselves—with the quiet encouragement and support of the then-holy father, Pope John Paul II.

Beginning in the late nineties and continuing until the mid-teens of the twenty-first century, PRI worked closely with faithful Catholics in China on a number of projects, building and restoring churches, funding Safe House for women fleeing forced abortion, and helping to set up a couple of orphanages for babies abandoned under the one-child policy. It was a period of relative openness in China. But it was not to last.

THE FIRST BLUNDER

Even then, the officially atheistic Communist Party and its agents remained a brooding, hostile presence over both church communities but by common agreement was kept out of the local arrangements that allowed Catholics from both to coexist, even cooperate. Underground bishops, with the permission of the Vatican, named their own successors. The Patriotic Association named its own bishops, but these then almost always sought, and almost always got, consecration by the pope.

Then the Vatican Secretariat of State, which had representatives in all but a handful of countries around the world, decided to enter into formal talks with the PRC. He established direct contact with Beijing in 2005 with the goal of signing a written agreement with the atheistic regime over the appointment of bishops.

This was a major blunder on several counts.

First, it drew the attention of the Chinese Party-State to the activities of the Catholic Church in China. Catholics form a small minority of the Chinese population, and are scattered in communities throughout the length and breadth of the country. As such, they were able to evangelize, build churches, and even open seminaries, all while attracting relatively little hostile attention from the central government. “The mountains are high, and the emperor is far away,” as the Chinese say.

Once Beijing entered into formal negotiations with the Vatican, however, the Party-State began to pay a lot more attention to the activities of the domestic followers of this “hostile foreign power.” In other words, the mere fact of opening negotiations put a target on the backs of Chinese Catholics.

Vatican diplomats seem not to have realized that they were dealing with a one-party dictatorship that was far more brutal, and far less tolerant of any expressions of religious faith, than Mexico in the 1990s or Vietnam in the 2000s. Moreover, in the view of the CCP, all belief in transcendental religions, especially those with foreign connections like Catholicism, is suspect, even treasonous.

The problem goes even deeper than this. As I wrote in *Bully of Asia*, since the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre, the Chinese Communist Party has been promoting an extremely toxic form of national narcissism. The Chinese people are constantly being told that they, their culture, and their country are naturally superior to any other people, culture, or country that has ever existed. To be numbered among the descendants of the dragon, party propaganda insists, is to be part of the greatest phenomenon in human history. It means that you are part of the “Kingdom at the Center of the Earth” and that you deserve dominion over the lesser folk from the fringes.



The state religion of China, in other words, is China itself. “Socialism with Chinese characteristics” is its catechism, the members of the party are its priesthood, and “core leader” Xi Jinping serves as its high priest. The whole of China serves as its temple, within whose sacred precincts its people are encouraged to worship their own collective greatness—and “core leader” Xi, of course.

religious sites must be registered, no religious activities can be held beyond registered venues, non-registered clergymen are forbidden to host religious liturgies, and that minors and party members are forbidden from entering churches. ... The living space for the Church is getting less and less.”

THE ROAD LEADING TO THE SINO-VATICAN AGREEMENT

As I say, perhaps the biggest blunder made by Vatican diplomats in their on-again, off-again negotiations with China has been insisting, after the fashion in Western diplomatic circles, on the need for a formal written agreement. An informal understanding would have been far more appropriate in the Chinese cultural context. That arrangement, not surprisingly, went aground not long after formal negotiations began in 2005. Why? Primarily because the Vatican asked for it to be put in writing. As a result of this blunder, at least eight bishops have been illegally “ordained” by the Chinese Communist Party in the years since.

According to a priest of the Underground Church, those new rules state that “all

China then informed the Vatican’s Secretary of State that two things must happen before such an agreement was made.

First, the Holy Father must, without exception, consecrate all the Patriotic bishops that he and Pope Benedict, for very good reasons, had previously rejected.

Second, he must eliminate the Underground Church, starting with its bishops. Elderly Underground bishops must be forcibly retired and replaced with Patriotic bishops of Beijing’s choosing, while younger Underground bishops must be reassigned to subordinate roles in the Patriotic church.

This process would obviously continue until the last of the 30-odd Underground bishops have been side-lined and silenced, one way or another.

It is the prospect of this “sell-out” of the Underground Church that sent Hong Kong’s Cardinal Joseph Zen to Rome, to plead the cause of his Chinese co-believers to the Holy Father himself:¹

¹ Steven W. Mosher, “Parolin and the China Negotiations: First, Do No Harm,” PRI, February 27, 2018, <https://www.pop.org/parolin-china-negotiations-first-no-harm>.



II THE SINO-VATICAN AGREEMENT



When the Sino-Vatican Agreement was signed, Cardinal Joseph Zen, the retired Archbishop of Hong Kong, questioned whether the authority to appoint bishops had been ceded to the Chinese Communist Party. The CCP intended for the agreement itself to serve as a tool to be used to force bishops and clergy in the underground Church to join the Patriotic Association; and also, it has now become clear, as ‘cover’ for an intensifying persecution of the Catholic Church as a whole.²

After the signing, Father Bernardo Cervellera, a missionary of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions and head of Asia News wrote, “Until now

there was talk of a temporary power of veto of the pontiff: the Pope would be able to give the reasons for his refusal within three months, but if the government found the papal motivations inconsistent, it would continue with the appointment and the ordination the chosen candidate. Not having the text of the agreement, we do not know if this clause has been maintained, if indeed the pontiff will have the last word on the appointments and ordinations, or if instead his authority is only formally recognized.”³

Aside from the critical question of who is really in charge of appointing bishops, the secret Sino-Vatican agreement has raised other

² Thomas D. Williams, “China Expert: Communist Party Determined to ‘Extinguish the Catholic Faith,’” Breitbart, August, 8 2020, <https://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2020/08/08/china-expert-communist-party-determined-to-extinguish-the-catholic-faith>.

³ Bernardo Cervellera, “China-Vatican agreement: some positive steps, but without forgetting the martyrs,” AsiaNews, September 24, 2018, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/China-Vatican-agreement-some-positive-steps-but-without-forgetting-the-martyrs-45023.html>.

concerns as well. While it was supposed to provide some protection for the Catholic Church in China, it has instead been turned on its head. It is perversely being used by the Communist authorities to crush the long-suffering but faithful Underground Catholic Church while the Vatican stands silently by.

The Vatican signed an agreement with China that has effectively ceded control over the appointment of bishops to Beijing. In return, Beijing has agreed to recognize the pope as the head of China's Catholics. The pope ceded his very real authority to name bishops to China's communist authorities in return for the promise of symbolic recognition as the titular head of all Catholics in China.⁴

I see it as a betrayal on several levels. It betrays the authority of the papacy by giving the Chinese Communist Party the right to name bishops. It betrays the underground Church in China, a Church which not only has survived decades of persecution at the hands of the authorities but is now, once again, under siege. And—I would argue—because it is a secret agreement, it betrays the Truth by allowing both sides to misrepresent it.

A secret agreement keeps Catholics in China and around the world in the dark about whatever compromises the Vatican has made. Even worse, it also allows the Communist authorities to misrepresent the agreement to the Chinese faithful in whichever way they choose. They will surely use the borrowed authority of the Vatican to undermine the faith of believers in China in their own Church.

If the Vatican was relying on the trustworthiness of Chinese Communist officials, they were

very wrong. Beijing has signed many agreements over the years—agreements whose terms are publicly known—only to violate them before the ink is dry on the paper.

The agreement, as I predicted, has benefited the Chinese Party-State, which has used it to assert its control over the Underground Church in China. It tells the faithful that the Pope himself has recognized the Communist-run Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, and that each and every one of China's 12 million Catholics must worship only in its churches. It has allowed the CCP to greatly intensify its attack on the Underground Church, using the borrowed authority of the Vatican itself as an ideological assault weapon.

The Communist Party has long been determined to force underground Chinese Catholics out of the catacombs so they can be brought under strict Party control. The agreement gives the CCP leverage to do exactly this. It was negotiated by clerics who have little personal understanding of China's recent history of brutally suppressing religion. Why anyone in the Vatican, up to and including the current Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, would think it's a good idea to allow the CCP to use the borrowed authority of the Supreme Pontiff to this effort in this way is a mystery to me.⁵

HOW WE GOT HERE: VATICAN-CHINA RELATIONS

This approach was remarkably successful. During the reign of Pope John Paul II, all but two of the bishops of the Communist Party-controlled CPCA secretly asked to be recognised by the Holy See as legitimate bishops. These requests were, after an

⁴ Steven W. Mosher, "Vatican to Allow Beijing to Name Bishops," Population Research Institute, September 19, 2018, <https://www.pop.org/vatican-to-allow-beijing-to-name-bishops>.

⁵ Steven W. Mosher, "Expert condemns Vatican for 'betrayal' in secret agreement with Communist China," LifeSiteNews, September 22, 2018, <https://www.lifesitenews.com/opinion/vatican-signs-secret-agreement-with-communist-china>.



investigation of the applicant's faith and character, honoured by the Holy Father. In other words, the Patriotic bishops were renouncing schism and joining their brother bishops in the Universal Church. By the end of Pope John Paul's pontificate, the break between the Underground and Patriotic churches was almost healed.

With the beginning of Pope Francis's reign other negotiators were tapped to deal with the Chinese authorities, chief among them the disgraced ex-Cardinal McCarrick, who is now laicised and living in a retreat house. Now that the extent of McCarrick's corruption is widely-known—both sexual and financial—it seems incredible that he was ever placed in charge of negotiations with China, but in fact he played a leading role.

Because of his sexual abuse of minors, Pope Benedict XVI had placed restrictions on McCarrick's ministry and travel. Why a notorious homosexual predator was given such a sensitive assignment, one which would affect the fate of millions of souls, is a mystery to me. More corrupt politician than honest prelate, it is perhaps not surprising that the deal that McCarrick helped to negotiate is so deeply flawed.⁶

According to McCarrick's long-time secretary, Msgr. Anthony Figueredo, McCarrick simply ignored the restrictions placed on his ministry and travel by Pope Benedict. He continued to be active in international diplomacy, and made visits to Beijing on the Vatican's behalf. As Msgr. Figueredo reports, he wrote to Pope Francis,

“When you greeted me so cheerfully in Washington as an adjunct member of the foreign service, I received this as a challenge to continue as an amateur in the

very noble work of the foreign relations of the Holy See. I have maintained on a quiet level our relationship with China and have been developing new relationships with the Arab countries of the Middle East. They have been inviting me to many of their meetings where I can continue to assure them of Your Holiness' interest, concern, and love for our Muslim brothers and sisters ... With God's help, before He calls me home, I will help to bring you China and the great dream of Matteo Ricci will begin to be realized once again” (letter to Pope Francis of September 30, 2015).

In May 2018, I had the opportunity to sit down with Cardinal Parolin, who as the Secretary of State is generally regarded as the number two man in the Vatican. I laid out reasons why signing any agreement with the Chinese Communist Party—notorious for having violated nearly every agreement it had signed—would be a mistake. However, Cardinal Parolin indicated to me that the terms of the agreement had already been negotiated and, as he put it, “We are simply waiting on the Chinese side to sign the agreement.”

I did warn him about the new regulations governing religious activity which had come into effect on 1 February 2018. These called for Underground bishops and priests to submit to the Communist authorities as a condition of staying in ministry. He dismissed my concern, saying that: “We have no objection to the requirement that everyone register with the authorities.”

But this was no simple “registration.” In the hands of the Communist Party it was twisted into a requirement that all clergy join the schismatic

⁶ Steven W. Mosher, “The Sino-Vatican Agreement—One Year Later,” Lumen Fidei Institute, January 21, 2020, <https://www.lumenfidei.ie/the-sino-vatican-agreement-one-year-later>.

Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association and profess that their first loyalty was to the officially atheistic Party-State. Those who refused were subject to even more intense persecution than before. “What should we do?” Underground clergy cried out in anguish and confusion, feeling that they had been abandoned by the universal church.⁷

THE BISHOPS AND OTHER CHESS PIECES

In the Sino-Vatican agreement, Beijing insisted upon using what it called a “Chinese model” for the appointment of bishops. Under the terms of this model, the communist authorities alone will nominate a potential candidate for bishop. The pope will then have a certain period of time to either approve or reject this candidate. If he vetoes the first candidate, Beijing will nominate another.

The pope’s “veto power,” however, is not unlimited.

As a Chinese official familiar with the negotiations was quoted as saying, “[w]e cannot submit endless candidate lists to the Vatican if the pontiff keeps saying no. We may have to appoint bishops unapproved by the pontiff after a set number of rounds of negotiations. Such bishops may not be legitimate under the Church doctrine, but they can still give Church services to Chinese Catholics.”

In other words, the pope may veto an obviously unsuitable candidate or two, but Beijing has made it clear that there is a limit to the number

of times a papal veto can be used. It has also limited the amount of time that the Vatican has to respond once a candidate’s name is submitted by the CCP authorities.

This means that at the end of the day, it is the communist authorities, and not Pope Francis, who will have the final say over who becomes a bishop in the Chinese Catholic Church.

In a major pre-emptory concession, the Vatican promised that the pope would lift the excommunication of the seven illicit “bishops” of the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association even before the new agreement was signed.⁸ It is hard to avoid the conclusion that this entire group of bishops was given a kind of blanket amnesty. In a further concession, the pope later ordered two bishops of the Underground Church, who had faithfully served in their offices for decades under intense persecution, to hand over their dioceses to bishops appointed by the communist authorities.

“I now invite all Chinese Catholics to work towards reconciliation,” Pope Francis would later write, as if it were the Catholics themselves who were sowing division. But the division between Catholics in the underground and patriotic Churches was not caused by the Catholics themselves. Rather, it arose in reaction to actions by the Chinese Communist Party, which in 1958 set up a Party-controlled Church called the Catholic Patriotic Association. Those Catholics who were not willing to compromise their faith went underground.

This division cannot be healed by Catholics themselves, because they were not the cause of it. The Chinese Communist Party was the cause

⁷ Kathy Clubb, “Steve Mosher on the Sino-Vatican Agreement,” The Freedoms Project, December 2, 2019, <https://www.thefreedomproject.com/item/462-steve-mosher-on-the-sino-vatican-agreement>.

⁸ Steven W. Mosher, “Vatican to Allow Beijing to Name Bishops,” Population Research Institute, September 19, 2018, <https://www.pop.org/vatican-to-allow-beijing-to-name-bishops>.



of the original division, and it remains today a dominating and controlling presence over all Catholics in China.

The entire exercise seems somehow backwards, because historically it was the Underground Church that remained loyal to the Magisterium, while the Patriotic Church accepted the authority of the Chinese Communist Party to govern its affairs.

Now their roles are seemingly reversed. The Pope's secret agreement apparently recognizes the Catholic Patriotic Church as the only licit Catholic organization in the country, and puts the onus on the long-persecuted Underground Church to accept supervision and control by its authorities. That is to say, it lends the authority of the Magisterium to the Communist Party itself, which will be able to claim—rightly—that the Pope has ordered underground bishops, priests,

and laity to cooperate with the religious authorities anointed by the Chinese Communist Party.⁹

The Vatican-China agreement almost seems deliberately designed to be nonbinding on the Chinese Party-State, since its terms have been kept secret from the world in general and from Chinese Catholics in particular.

The Chinese Party-State, on the other hand, has cleverly used the pretext of a Vatican-China agreement to increase its persecution of the Underground Church in China. It has insisted that each and every one of China's 12 million Catholics worship only in churches approved by the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association. It has used the borrowed authority of the Vatican to further clamp down on unregistered churches in so-called underground communities led by bishops loyal only to Rome.

⁹ Steven W. Mosher, "Pope Francis empowered Communists with Magisterial authority in Vatican/China deal," LifeSiteNews, September 28, 2018, <https://www.lifesitenews.com/opinion/pope-francis-empowered-communists-with-magisterial-authority-in-vatican-chi>.



THE EFFECT OF THE AGREEMENT



By now it is clear to everyone—even Vatican diplomats, presumably—that things have gone from bad to worse for Catholics in China.

The Communist authorities are telling Underground bishops, priests, and laity that the new agreement not only requires them to register with the government, but to join the so-called “Catholic Patriotic Association.” This nearly all of them refuse to do, since they know that the Patriotic Association is not in communion with Rome. As punishment, the Communists have begun arresting resisters and demolishing their churches and shrines. The Underground Diocese of Fengxiang, Shaanxi province, has been particularly hard hit. On April 4, 2019, a newly built church in the diocese, still under construction, was destroyed as parishioners looked on in horror.

The Vatican has seemed to turn a blind eye to the pressure on bishops and priests to join the

schismatic Catholic Patriotic Association, perhaps on the grounds that it may provide a safe haven for Catholics in China, but in this, it is mistaken. Being a “Patriotic” bishop does not provide automatic immunity from persecution. Nor does being a “Patriotic” parish necessarily protect the parish church from the wrecking ball.

In the face of such ongoing persecution and destruction, the silence from the proponents of the agreement that was signed last September has been deafening. Cardinal Parolin, the Vatican’s secretary of state, who by all accounts is the author of the accord, continued to counsel patience.

Yet, judging by the benchmarks that he himself set, the agreement has failed to deliver. In the eight months since its signing, the agreement has been used by Beijing as an excuse to limit—not expand—the religious freedom of Catholics in China. If anything, the authorities have intensified their efforts to restrict all the activities of all

religions, and seem intent upon driving them out of public life altogether.

When Catholics questioned why they were being forced to study the works of Xi Jinping, an official bluntly told them, “It is because you believe in God that you are required to study and answer the questions. This is to change your thinking.” The official added that because they thanked God instead of the Party, they needed to “study Xi” more.

The goal is to brainwash everyone into believing only in Communist leader Xi and his party, rejecting God and His Church.

Communism has always been a total ideology, one that seeks to control not only the acts and words of those under its power, but their very thoughts as well. Those who refuse to submit are enemies of the revolution—counter-revolutionaries—who must be identified, targeted, and destroyed. This is a political system that feeds off of the destruction of an endless series of “enemies,” real and imagined.¹⁰

BISHOP GUO: FAITHFUL BISHOP TO GOD, ENEMY OF THE RED EMPIRE

Bishop Vincent Guo was supposed to be the poster child of a successful rapprochement between the Vatican and China, as well as a sign that the longstanding rift between the Underground Catholic church and its state-run counterpart had been healed. Instead, he is on the run from the Communist authorities. How did this happen?

Until 2017, Bishop Guo was the ordinary of the Diocese of Mindong, located in the southern province of Fujian. He was recognized by the Holy See, but not by the Party-State, which had imposed an unpopular—and unrecognized—Patriotic “bishop” by the name of Zhan Silu on the same diocese. While the Underground church was thriving—with 80,000 members, 57 priests, 200 nuns, 300 consecrated lay people and hundreds of lay catechists—the Patriotic church counterpart run by Msgr. Zhan boasted less than ten thousand members served by only 12 priests.

With the signing of the “provisional agreement” between the Vatican and China on September 22, 2018, the diocese was turned upside down—literally. The excommunication of Msgr. Zhan and six other invalidly ordained bishops was lifted by Pope Francis, and Bishop Guo stepped down as the ordinary of the Mindong diocese in favor of Bishop Zhan, and became his auxiliary.

But even this wasn’t enough for the Communist Party officials who set out to enforce the new agreement. That agreement, they said, required all Underground priests and bishops to join the schismatic Patriotic Catholic Association



¹⁰ Steven W. Mosher, “After Vatican agreement, China’s Communist leader is still trying to stamp out religion,” LifeSiteNews, April 23, 2019, <https://www.lifesitenews.com/blogs/after-vatican-agreement-chinas-communist-leader-is-still-trying-to-stamp-out-religion>.

as a condition of being allowed to continue their priestly ministry. Anyone who refused would not be allowed to function as a priest.

Bishop Guo, who apparently knew that the agreement said no such thing, refused to sign. As a result, he has been relentlessly harassed, threatened, browbeaten and even has “disappeared” for short periods of time. For most of the past year he has been under constant police surveillance, with two police officers assigned to watch him day and night. He recently managed to escape his handlers and is, of this writing, in hiding. When asked about him, one of his flock said, “Please pray for the safety of our bishop. He is very tired.”

While Bishop Vincent Guo may be, as AsiaNews puts it, the best-known “victim of the Sino-Vatican agreement,” he is by far not the only one. Nor is he the most harshly persecuted. Because the diocese of Mindong has been chosen by the Communist Party as a “model” for the implementation of the agreement, Bishop Guo and his priests have probably not been as badly treated as Underground bishops and priests in other parts of China, some of whom have simply gone missing or have been summarily “laicized” by the Party-State when they, too, refused to join the Patriotic Catholic Association.

While the provisions of the agreement remain secret, it reportedly deals with bilateral relations and the ordination of bishops. It does not call for Underground bishops and priests to join the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (CPCA), which remains in the eyes of the Vatican a schismatic creation of the Chinese Communist Party, but it does apparently acknowledge that Catholic clergy will be required to register with the Communist authorities. And that concession was all the Communist authorities needed to begin strong-arming Underground clergy into joining the CPCA as part of the “registration” process.

It took nine months—and countless pleas from Underground clergy—for the Vatican to formulate a response to this violation of the Sino-Vatican Agreement. The “Pastoral Guidelines” issued to bishops and clerics in China in June of 2018, however, only added to the confusion.

First, the Guidelines imply that the decision to register with the authorities is entirely up to the individual bishop or priest in question, but since the Vatican has already approved such registration, on what grounds is a member of the Underground clergy to object when Communist officials come calling?

Second, the Guidelines, using oddly convoluted phrasing, suggests that, “if ... the text of the declaration required for the registration does not appear respectful of the Catholic faith,” a priest may sign. But there is no “if” about it. Such “declarations” always require joining a schismatic organization, the CPCA, and therefore are always “disrespectful of the Catholic faith.”

Third, the Guidelines instruct a priest to “specify in writing” that he is signing the declaration “without failing in his duty to remain faithful to the principles of Catholic doctrine.” They add that, when such a written clarification “is not possible,” the priest may do so orally and “if possible” in the presence of a witness.

As one who has been arrested in China and forced to write a “confession,” I can personally attest to the fact that there is exactly zero chance that a beleaguered priest will be allowed to either call witnesses, amend the “declaration” in any way, or even openly declare that he disagrees with its contents. Reading such advice calls to mind a Chinese saying: “One doesn’t know whether to laugh or cry.”



It is hard to say what the Vatican has gotten in return for an agreement that Cardinal Zen openly calls a “sellout” of the Underground church. It is perhaps easier to say what it has not gotten. It has not gotten China to consent to the ordination of the roughly 20 bishop candidates identified by the Holy See within the Patriotic church, some of whom have already been secretly ordained. It has not gotten the Communist authorities to accept a significant number of bishops of the underground community. In fact, of the 40 or so underground bishops, only one has to date been officially recognized by the Communists.

The only thing that the Vatican and the Chinese authorities seem to have in common is a belief that

there should only be one Catholic church in China. For General Secretary Xi Jinping and his minions that means eliminating the Underground church. For the Vatican it means encouraging everyone (without explicitly saying so) to join the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, which it seems to believe offers a safe, legal haven for Catholics to practice their faith.

But it doesn't. The CPCA is merely an instrument that the Chinese Communist Party is using to bring all Catholics under Party control. The ultimate goal of the atheistic Communists who run China remains the same: to destroy all religious faith within China's borders.

“If before the signing of the Agreement we remained fearless and maintained our faith no matter how much we were coerced, the Holy See would have supported us, too,” Bishop Guo said. “But now, we're really helpless. To be frank, whoever persists will suffer greater suppression and persecution from the CCP.”

The road of persecution is still very long, Bishop Guo added, and Catholics must use it to strengthen their faith. Bishop Guo is living out his words on his own long Via Dolorosa—as he tries to keep one step ahead of the Communist authorities.¹¹

THE CCP IS WAGING WAR ON ALL RELIGIONS—BUT CATHOLICS ARE A PARTICULAR TARGET

Hitler's so-called “Nazification” program was an effort to compel all the churches in Nazi Germany to serve the goals of the Third Reich. The ultimate

¹¹ Steven W. Mosher, “Faithful Chinese bishop on the run from communists highlights Vatican/China deal disaster,” LifeSiteNews, November 29, 2019, <https://www.lifesitenews.com/blogs/faithful-chinese-bishop-on-the-run-from-communists-highlights-vatican-china-deal-disaster>.

goal of Nazification, however, was to replace the worship of the Triune God with the worship of the Third Reich and its leader, Adolf Hitler. The ultimate goal of sinicization, it is becoming clear, is the worship of the Chinese Party-State and its leader, Xi Jinping.¹²

In China, you name a human right and the government of China is abusing it—freedom of the press, freedom of association, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of conscience, freedom to practice one’s faith—these are all forbidden to the Chinese people. China persecutes not only Christians, but minorities such as the Uygers in the West, Mongols and Manchus in the North, and Tibetans in the South. While some countries violate some human rights, China has the distinction of violating all human rights regularly.¹³



The People’s Republic of China is a police state which, fearful of its own people, spends more money on internal security than on national defense.

The world is waking up to the fact that the Chinese Communists are waging war on all religions, but especially on Catholics and Muslims. For example, the U.S. Commission in International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), in its 20th Annual Report on International Religious Freedom, devoted an entire section to China. Not only did it designate China as a “Tier 1” country—a category reserved for the worst offenders of religious freedom—it went further. It accused China of being “in a category all by itself” in terms of both the scope and severity of its attacks on religious believers.

The state seems to see Catholics and other Christians as a particular threat, perhaps because their numbers have been growing so fast. China’s Christians may now outnumber the 94-million-member Chinese Communist Party, so it is no surprise that Party leader Xi Jinping sees them as a threat to his continued rule. In all, up to 3 million people in China may currently be in detention camps solely because of their faith, mostly Christians, Buddhists, and Uighur Muslims.

In light of this persecution, the Commission has recommended that the Chinese officials in charge be sanctioned. Of course, the person most responsible for the current wave of persecution is Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping himself, whose determination to stamp out all religious sentiment in China rivals the late Chairman Mao’s purges of the Fifties and Sixties. In fact, Xi Jinping and other Chinese Communist leaders have consciously rejected all of the building blocks of Western Civilization—democracy, the rule of law, civil society, a free press, human

¹² Steven W. Mosher, “Chinese Communists intensify war on country’s Catholics,” Legatus, June 1, 2019, <https://legatus.org/news/chinese-communists-intensify-war-on-countrys-catholics>.

¹³ Steven W. Mosher, “Tracking the Dragon,” National Catholic Register, April 8, 2001, <https://www.ncregister.com/interview/tracking-the-dragon>.

rights, and the free market. All of these are, in the words of Central Committee Directive No. 9 of 2013, “threats to the continued rule of the Party.”

They understand that China’s conversion to Christianity would mark the end of their brutal system of rule. This is why the persecution of the Church in China will only intensify.

China is using a nationwide hi-tech surveillance system in an attempt to watch everyone all the time. And what it does with this information is to assess everyone’s political reliability by giving them a so-called Social Credit Score. If you associate with dissidents, post criticism of regime policies, or even fail to pay back a bank loan, your Social Credit Score plummets. A low Social Credit Score will exclude you from well-paying jobs, make it impossible for you to get a house or a car loan, or even book a hotel room.

There are even suggestions that, if your Social Credit Score falls too low, you will be pre-emptively arrested and sent to a re-education camp. Not because you have actually committed a crime, but because you are likely to.

This is because one of the ways that people can improve their own Social Credit Score is by reporting on the supposed misdeeds of others. Individuals can earn points, for example, for reporting those who violate the new restrictions on religious practice, such as Underground Catholic priests on the run from the authorities, Christians who illegally meet to pray in private homes, or Uyghurs and Kazakhs in China’s far west whom they spot praying in public, fasting during Ramadan, or just growing a beard.

It is China’s ancient totalitarian impulse—the absolute rule of the god-emperor over his people combined with the totalitarian impulse of

communism—has been updated using modern technology—AI, machine learning, face recognition, DNA. Using stolen Western technology, the world’s first hi-tech digital dictatorship has been born in China. But it will not stay there. Other governments, including Venezuela, have begun adopting it. We will have to be vigilant to keep it from spreading to our own countries.¹⁴

XI JINPING’S ENFORCERS: THE UNITED FRONT DEPARTMENT OF THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY

On March 22, 2018, the Chinese Communist Party announced that all “religious affairs” in China would henceforth be supervised by a shadowy Party office called the “United Front Department.” The former government agency responsible for Catholic and other believers—the State Administration of Religious Affairs bureau (SARA)—has been summarily abolished.

United Front officials, zealous communists all, would be the ones enforcing the new restrictions on religious activity, issued on February 1, 2018. These make it illegal to take one’s own children to Mass, require all Catholics to register with the government, and forbid illegal religious assemblies, including catechism and Sunday school classes. The ultimate goal of these new regulations is to stamp out Catholicism, and the Communist officials in charge will be only too happy to work towards that goal.

To understand why putting religious affairs into the hands of the CCP’s United Front Department bodes so ill for Catholics you need to understand the purpose of the Department and its work.

The United Front Department was created by Chairman Mao Zedong to co-opt and control

¹⁴ Kathy Clubb, “Steve Mosher on the Sino-Vatican Agreement,” The Freedoms Project, December 2, 2019, <https://www.thefreedomsproject.com/item/462-steve-mosher-on-the-sino-vatican-agreement>.

non-Communist organizations and individuals during the Chinese civil war. Its efforts were so successful that Mao called it one of the three “magic weapons” that helped the revolution to succeed. (His other two “magic weapons” were propaganda and, not surprisingly, the Red Army.)

Putting the United Front Department in charge of religious affairs means that the Party leadership is determined to make the Patriotic Catholic Church into an active “agent of control” for the regime with a single purpose: to subvert and undermine the faith of the millions of Catholics in China, and to prevent them from spreading the faith to others, including their own children. It is nothing less than a hostile takeover—an expropriation if you will—of the Catholic Church in China.

It is not hard to see that there is an irreconcilable contradiction between the impending demands of the United Front Department and the demands of the Catholic faith. As for the Underground Church, it will simply be annihilated, insofar as it is within the regime’s power to do so.

United Front tactics were used, as they were in the late 1950s, to complete the subversion of the Catholic Patriotic Church into an agent of the state. Then the Church itself will be used to force the ideological assimilation of all Chinese Catholics into the political order—the people’s democratic dictatorship—that Xi Jinping controls. It is impossible not to conclude that Xi’s ultimate goal is the same as Mao’s was, namely, the total eradication of this “foreign” religion from the soil of China.

The agents of this subversion will be Patriotic Catholic Bishops like Bishop Peter Fang Jianping of Tangshan, one of three compromised bishops

who are members of China’s rubberstamp parliament, the National People’s Congress.

Bishop Fang eagerly promotes Xi Jinping’s call for the “sinicization of religion,” which is the idea that religion should chiefly serve the interests of the Chinese Communist Party that Xi himself leads.

Faced with a similar choice between secular and sacred authority, St. Thomas More famously said, “I am the King’s good servant, but I am God’s first.”

Bishop Fang would turn More’s affirmation of the faith on its head. He is saying, in effect: “I am God’s good servant, but I am Emperor Xi’s first.”¹⁵

In meetings in the Vatican, I have stressed that Xi Jinping already has more power than the late Chairman Mao Zedong and aspires for more. “He is not only the head of the Communist Party, as Mao was, but is also the head of the government and of the military, which Mao wasn’t. The Chinese people mockingly call him ‘the chairman of everything.’ His cult of personality is growing. Like Mao, he wants the Chinese people to worship him, not the God of the Bible. That is why Xi Jinping has been tightening controls on religious activities of all kinds.”

“The people you have been dealing with in the Bureau of Religious Affairs for the past two decades are no longer in power,” I stressed to them. “The Bureau itself has been dissolved. Xi has given responsibility for religious matters to the United Front Department of the Chinese Communist Party. This means that Xi doesn’t want to simply

¹⁵ Steven W. Mosher, “Xi Jinping Places Catholic Church in China Under Direct Party Control,” Population Research Institute, May 1, 2018, <https://www.pop.org/xi-jinping-places-catholic-church-in-china-under-direct-party-control>.



regulate the activities of the Catholic Church in China. He wants to eliminate the Church entirely.”

Here was the crux of the matter: Senior officials in the Vatican believed that, by signing an agreement with the Chinese Communist Party, they would somehow avoid a formal separation of the Church in China from Rome.

The problem with this belief is that the Patriotic Church is already in schism. In fact, it was to create just such a schism that the Communist Party established the Patriotic church in 1958.

As for faithful Chinese Catholics, they saw the signing of the Sino-Vatican Agreement as a betrayal. Why would the Vatican enter into an agreement with a viciously atheistic regime that is actively trying to stamp out all religious belief and practice within China, starting with Catholicism, Chinese Catholics ask. There is no good answer.¹⁶

FAITH FORBIDDEN, CHURCHES SHUT DOWN

In China, Catholic churches are being torn down or denuded of their crosses and statues. Signs are posted outside forbidding anyone under the age of 18 from entering. Pictures of the Madonna and Child replaced with pictures of “People’s Leader” Xi Jinping. The Ten Commandments painted over with quotes from Xi.

Party apparatchiks have been trying to hound the Underground Catholic church out of existence for the past several years, closing down churches and hunting down priests and bishops. But the state-controlled Patriotic Church is facing a surprising new wave of persecution as well, despite its close connection to the authorities.



A newly constructed convent being torn down in Northeast China. Photo by an unknown Chinese believer.

On February 1, 2020, new and even more rigorous controls were imposed on all religious activity in China. The “Control Measures for Religious Groups”, as they are called, deal with every imaginable aspect of the life of the Patriotic Church—from Mass and the sacraments to meetings of the parish council and collections. All of these must be reported—in advance—to the government’s “Religious Affairs” office for its approval.

For Chinese believers, who understand how the Communist Party works in practice, the most chilling line is this open-ended threat: “Religious groups must report to the appropriate government authorities all other matters that should be reported.”

In other words, even if the new “Control Measures” do not specifically require you to report a certain activity, you can still be found guilty of violating them. This Catch-22 allows any Communist official to charge any religious group at any time with carrying out an unauthorized

¹⁶ Steven W. Mosher, “Report from Rome: What Do Vatican Officials Think to Gain in their Agreement with China? (And What Will Chinese Catholics Lose?)” OnePeterFive, May 31, 2018, <https://onepeterfive.com/report-from-rome-what-do-vatican-officials-think-to-gain-in-their-agreement-with-china-and-what-will-chinese-catholics-lose>.



religious activity on the grounds that, “You should have reported that to us and you didn’t.”

The Party’s goal in promulgating the “Control Measures”, which consist of 41 different rules, is twofold:

First, it wants to stamp out all religious groups, such as the Underground Catholic Church, that it does not directly control.

As Rule Number 3 warns right at the outset: “Without the approval of the Religious Affairs office of the people’s government, or registration with the Civil Affairs office of the people’s government, a religious group cannot carry out any activities.”

In other words, without the permission of the authorities, you can’t even organize a Bible study.

Groups such as the Early Rain Covenant Church and the Falun Gong, which the state has already declared to be illegal “heretical cults”, will obviously never be allowed to register. But neither will the bishops and priests of the Underground Church, meaning that all the activities of their dozens of dioceses and thousands of parishes will be illegal too—unless and until they agree to join the schismatic Patriotic Church.

But the “Control Measures” make it clear that there is simply no “safe haven” for the faithful in China, in or out of the Patriotic Church. In fact, the new rules are intended to turn religious groups into junior partners of the Chinese Communist Party—while at the same time gradually strangling them out of existence altogether.

While the immediate goal of the new rules is to widen the schism between the Holy See and the Chinese faithful, the long-term goal is much more ambitious: it is to extinguish faith in God altogether, replacing it with faith in the Chinese Communist Party.

Read Rule Number 17:

“Religious groups must propagandize the principles and policies of the Chinese Communist Party, along with national laws and regulations, to all of their religious staff and followers; [they must] educate and guide all religious staff and followers to embrace the Chinese Communist Party’s leadership, to embrace the socialist system, to uphold the path of ‘Socialism with Chinese Characteristics,’ and to obey all national laws and regulations; [they must] correctly resolve the relationship between national laws and religious commandments ...”

If this sounds like the Party wants to use religious groups to strengthen its own hold on power, that’s because it does. Any diocese or parish that refuses to be used in this way will be declared heretical, and have their churches closed and their priests arrested. As for the priests themselves, they can either serve as junior political commissars, or they can go home. Does that sound like a safe haven to you?

Rule Number 5 adds that, in addition to “upholding the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and obeying the Constitution and national laws,” religious groups must “uphold the principle of independence [from all foreign groups] and the overall policy of the sinicization of religion...”

Sinicization of religion, it should be noted, means replacing the worship of God with the worship of the Communist Party of China and its leaders. This is precisely what the Nazis attempted

to do in the 1930s with its so-called Nazification program, namely, turn the Catholic and Protestant churches of Germany into ardent supporters of National Socialism and promoters of its ideology.

And it is exactly what the Chinese Communist Party is trying to do today in China, not just to the Catholic church, but to every church, mosque, Taoist shrine, and Buddhist temple in China.¹⁷

It is perhaps no surprise that Pope Francis has been increasingly silent where China is concerned. In the years following he did not utter a word about the agreement or the intensifying wave of persecution that Catholics in China were enduring as a result.

Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun, the retired Cardinal Archbishop of Hong Kong and a critic of the Sino-Vatican Agreement, responded to the silence of the hierarchy by issuing a moving heartfelt letter to the entire college of cardinals reminding them of their “grave responsibility to help the Holy Father in guiding the Church”, including the Church in China. He pointed out that the Agreement has been kept so secret by its authors, such as Cardinal Parolin, the Vatican’s Secretary of State, that they did not allow him, one of only two Chinese cardinals, to review it. The letter to the cardinals closes by saying: “Your Eminence, can we passively witness the murder of the Church in China by those who should protect and defend her from her enemies? Begging on my knees, your brother...”¹⁸

Neither Pope Francis nor Cardinal Parolin, who negotiated the Agreement with China, responded to Cardinal Zen’s letter.



Catholics in China understand, even if Vatican officials don’t, that the same instruments of manipulation and control that officials used so effectively in imposing the “one-child policy” on them for almost four decades are engaged in carrying out the sinicization of religious bodies.

The Communist authorities have transferred responsibility for the supervision of religious organizations and individuals from the government’s Bureau of Religious Affairs to the Party’s United Front Works Department.

Xi Jinping has said that the Party has three magic weapons—propaganda, United Front tactics, and the People’s Liberation Army. Propaganda is used for brainwashing, United Front is used to subvert and control organizations, and the PLA, of course, is used to kill one’s opponents when brainwashing and subversion fail.

The goal of the CCP’s United Front tactics is to hollow out the Catholic Church in China, allowing it to continue a zombie-like existence so that it can serve the Communist Party.

¹⁷ Steven W. Mosher, “How China’s Xi Jinping destroyed religion and made himself God,” New York Post, February 1, 2020, <https://nypost.com/2020/02/01/how-chinas-xi-jinping-destroyed-religion-and-made-himself-god>.

¹⁸ Marco Tosatti, “Cardinal Joseph Zen To His Brother Cardinals: The Church is Being Killed In China,” OnePeterFive, January 8, 2020, <https://onepeterfive.com/cardinal-joseph-zen-to-his-brother-cardinals-the-church-is-being-killed-in-china>.

A CRY FROM THE EAST

Not long ago, I received an anguished email from a Catholic in China.

“The walls are closing in,” she sent over the encrypted service that we use to protect her—and other contacts in China—from state surveillance. “I don’t know how much longer we will be able to continue our work of evangelization here.”

Because it conflicts with these larger ideological goals of the Chinese state, the Sino-Vatican agreement has faced enormous political headwinds from its inception. It has clearly not created more “space” for Catholic believers in China, as Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican secretary of state, had hoped, but, rather, has enabled the CCP to cloak its persecution of the underground Church by intimating that it has been at least tacitly approved by the Vatican.

In 2020, further evidence of bad faith on the part of the CCP, if any were needed, was new evidence that China has been caught hacking into Vatican computers. The hacking was obviously an effort to find out what the Vatican’s negotiating position would be as the two sides prepare to discuss whether the current agreement should be extended.

Other situations remain unresolved, as well, such as the case of Bishop James Su Zhimin, the Catholic bishop of Baoding in Hubei Province, who was arrested some 17 years ago and has not been heard from since. To fill the “vacant” see, which is one of the most important in China, the CCP has advanced a candidate who is a member of the Patriotic Association. The Holy See has yet to respond to the request, as far as is publicly known. Religious-freedom advocates are hoping that, before approving, or even considering, Beijing’s candidate, the Vatican will ask for a full accounting of the circumstances surrounding Bishop Su’s continued detention, while, indeed, fearing that he may be dead.

The provisional agreement expired in September 2020, and opinions at the time differed on whether it is in the best interest of Catholics in China that it be extended. Archbishop Claudio Celli, who helped negotiate the agreement, said that he thought the Holy See “should probably reconfirm it for one or two years.” Shortly thereafter, it was extended for an additional two years.

If there is a tiny light at the end of the dark night that the Catholic Church is now experiencing in China, it is this: When the fifth underground bishop, Bishop Paul Ma Cunguo of Shuozhou, joined the Patriotic Association in a quiet ceremony a few weeks ago, his oath of allegiance was much different than those made by the previous four bishops.

Those who preceded him were required to publicly swear “to work for an independent, self-governing church,” a condition clearly in conflict with the magisterium. As circulated on social media, Bishop Ma’s oath did not include this phrase. Instead, he reportedly promised to be “be faithful to the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic church, commit to building up the Church, the Body of Christ, and contribute to evangelization” and also to “abide by God’s command, fulfill his pastoral duties as a bishop and proclaim the Gospel faithfully.”

The only potentially questionable part of the oath—depending upon how it is interpreted—was a commitment to ensure that his diocesan priests would abide by the country’s constitution and laws, uphold the unity of the nation and social harmony, love the country and the church, and contribute to the “realization of the Chinese dream.”

As always in the case of the Chinese Communist Party, one has to be alert to the possibility of duplicity. “They always have a knife up their sleeve,” as one senior Vatican official put it.¹⁹

¹⁹ Steven W. Mosher, “Catholicism a Casualty of China’s New Cultural Revolution,” National Catholic Register, August 6, 2020, <https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/catholicism-a-casualty-of-china-s-new-cultural-revolution>.



CONCLUSION

In December 2021, CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping gave a speech at the National Conference on Work Related to Religious Affairs.²⁰ Xi emphasized that “religion and religious organizations must be actively guided to adapt to socialist society,” and that those working on “religious affairs” within the Party must take the Sinicization of religion as their major task. And lest there be any misunderstanding that Sinicization simply means making modest adaptations to Chinese culture, he stated this: “Sinicization means that all religious communities should be led by the Party, controlled by the Party, and support the Party.”²¹

Three months later, on March 21, 2022, an article was published in the *Study Times*, an official publication of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, laying out how Sinicization was to be accomplished through total control of religious organizations, their staff, and their doctrines by the Party.²²

The Party, it says, intends to “strengthen the ideological and political guidance of religious circles, improve the political consciousness of the religious circles, [and] guide the religious community to support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and the socialist system, unite closely around the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at the core, and firmly follow the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics”. It will, further, “encourage religious circles to diligently study Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, to study the history of the Party, the history of New

China, the history of reform and opening up, and the history of socialist development in a targeted manner, and to educate themselves deeply on the theme of ‘Love the Party, Love the Country, Love Socialism.’”

Ominously, the article explains that some religions are simply incapable of Sinicized. Specific reference was made to religious groups that “copy the foreign teaching model, take foreign values as their standard, and even accept the orders and domination of foreign forces.”

Those who refuse to submit to Party control will be considered to be “foreign hostile forces and extremist forces that are using religion to infiltrate and sabotage our country, leading our religions in a direction that deviates from the path of socialism, and plotting politically to defeat and subvert China.” Any religion that refuses to follow the Party’s direction in all things will be “resolutely suppressed and eradicated.”

It is hard to see how such a formulation leaves any room for fruitful collaboration between the Vatican and the CCP on, say, the appointment of bishops.

The CCP only allows religious organizations to exist because they serve, in effect, as an extension of the Party. The directive says that any religious group that does not teach socialism and the Party line, and does not teach its members to love the Party and socialism is a ‘backward’ religion engaged in ‘illegal religious activities,’ and is to be stamped out.

The suffering Church in China needs our prayers now more than ever.

²⁰ A news report in Chinese about the speech can be found at <https://tv.cctv.com/2021/12/04/VIDE6GtJIKDI9YQ4PEI2wTSj211204.shtml?spm=C31267.PFsKSaKh6QQC.S71105.3>

²¹ <https://bitterwinter.org/china-ccp-national-conference-on-religion/>

²² <https://bitterwinter.org/new-directives-on-sinicization-of-religion-love-the-party-love-socialism/>



ABOUT

POPULATION RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The Population Research Institute is a (501c3) non-profit research organization whose core values hold that people are the world's greatest resource. PRI's goals are to educate on this premise, to expose the myth of overpopulation, and to expose human rights abuses committed in population control programs. Our growing, global network of pro-life groups spans over 80 countries.

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- Defund these programs by exposing the coercion, deception, and racism inherent in them.
- Emphasize that people are the most valuable resource on the planet, the one resource we cannot do without.
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