

# CHINA: All religions are persecuted in China: the case of Catholics (By B. Cervellera)



Brussels (AsiaNews) – *“All religions in China are persecuted”*: This is the conclusion of Austrian Member of Parliament, Dr. Josef Weidenholzer, at a conference held yesterday afternoon at the European Parliament in Brussels on the theme *“Religious Freedom in China”*. The meeting organised by representatives of the People’s Party and the socialists, had several guest speakers who offered their witness to a packed hall. After a brief introduction by parliamentarians Bas Belder (Dutch) and Christian Dan Preda (Romanian), the following spoke: Bob Fu,

*founder and director of China Aid; Kuzzat Altay, Uighur exile in the United States; Marco Respinti, director of Bitter Winter; Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights without Frontiers; Fr. Bernardo Cervellera, editor of AsiaNews. From the audience emerged testimonies of Tibetan Buddhists, Taoists, sects, branded by the regime as “evil cults”. Below we publish the intervention of the editor of AsiaNews.*

**AsiaNews (24.01.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2G70S0j>– In a meeting on religious freedom in China in the Brussels office of the European Parliament, the testimonies of Protestant Christians, Uighurs, Catholics. The voices of Tibetan Buddhists, Taoists and sects. The intervention offered by the editor of AsiaNews.**

On January 14, AsiaNews published [a “Christmas diary” written by a Chinese priest](#), Fr. Stanislaus, who recounts the difficulties experienced by Chinese Catholics in a province of the Northeast. For “security” reasons Christmas Masses must be controlled by the police; young people under the age of 18 cannot take part; the New Year banners of good wishes, which the Chinese hang on their doorstep and with which Christians wish peace and blessings from God, cannot be sold.

On the same day, the foreign ministry spokesperson, Ms. Hua [Chunying], said: “You do not understand China. Do not you know how many Buddhist and Taoist temples and Christian churches in China operate legally? According to the law, Chinese citizens enjoy full religious freedom! We have taken preventive measures against terrorists and extremists, to allow so many ordinary people to fully enjoy normal religious freedom! ”

Perhaps in China all young Catholics under 18 are considered “terrorists”, forbidding them to attend Christmas Mass, Sunday Mass, and catechesis. To allow them to “fully enjoy religious freedom”, in primary and secondary schools of various provinces of China (Anhui, Henan, Inner Mongolia), representatives of the Ministry of Education have forbidden

pupils and students to celebrate Christmas ( and the Lunar New Year), to exchange gifts or to participate in religious ceremonies; in several provinces (Hebei, Shaanxi, Yunnan) Christmas celebrations and decorations were forbidden in the cities, seen as “an attack on Chinese culture”, a submission to Western “spiritual pollution”.

Apart from the historical error of considering Christianity as a “religion of the West” (given that Jesus was born in Asia and that Christianity arrived in China in the 7th century from Iraq), it is clear that the Chinese Communist Party is conducting a veritable “religious war” on Christianity and Catholics, all in the name of “security” and “nationalist patriotism”.

### ***In the name of security***

In the name of security, religious activities are divided into “normal” and “illegal”, although there are no differences in rite or execution between the two. What makes a religious activity “normal” is its submission to the control of political authorities: bishops, priests, places of worship registered with the Ministry of Religious Affairs; registered publications; registered pastoral plans; registered times; registered participants. Added to this are the ubiquitous cameras in the parish offices; the permits to ask to meet Chinese or foreign Catholic personnel; the continued presence of the police around or inside the places of worship.

“Illegal” religious activities are those carried out with personnel or in places that are not under control. The Catholics who carry out these activities, defined as “criminals”, claim their freedom as guaranteed by the Chinese constitution, but risk arrests, fines, expropriation of buildings, or their destruction.

In 1994, the UN envoy for religious freedom, Abdelfattah Amor, asked China to eliminate this difference between “normal” and

“illegal” activities, but this request went unheard.

It should be noted that this division – inserted by the government – creates the so-called official Church (of “normal” activities) and the underground (or unofficial) Church.

The instrument of this division is the Patriotic Association, guarantor of “normality”, whose statutes violate the integrity of the Catholic faith because it wants to build a Church “independent” from the universal Church and the Holy See. Official Church members agree to register as the “lesser evil”; those of the underground Church categorically refuse to register. But both communities suffer violations of religious freedom and risk elimination: the former from a suffocating control; the latter from arrests, disappearances, killings, destruction.

The situation has become even more radical with the launch of the [New Regulations on Religious Activities on February 1, 2018](#).

Under the new regulations the official communities must submit to the control of the dimensions, colors and position of crosses; the height and position of statues; texts posted online, with a ban on the live streaming of all ceremonies. The underground communities do not even have the right to exist.

Activities carried out in unregistered places and with unregistered personnel are subject to heavy fines: between 100 and 300 thousand yuan for “unauthorized” activities (Article 64).

In addition to incurring fines, sites that host “illegal” activities will be closed down, seized and subject to forfeiture in state assets. For several months police and representatives of the Religious Affairs Bureau have been systematically meeting bishops, priests and lay faithful of

the underground communities for “a cup of tea” and “to advise” them to register in the official communities.]

This explains the various “forced vacations” of [Wenzhou bishop Peter Shao Zhumin](#), or [the indoctrination classes](#) of priests in Hebei, Henan, Inner Mongolia, ...

Underground bishops and priests are “advised” to register in the official communities, taking them to “forced vacations” or to “indoctrination classes”.

It is our duty to at least name the victims of this persecution: Msgr. James Su Zhimin, underground bishop of Baoding (Hebei), who has been missing in police custody since 1997; Fr. Liu Honggeng of Baoding, missing since 2015; [Fr. Wei Heping \(also known as Yu Heping\), who died in 2015 in mysterious and suspicious circumstances.](#)

There are also victims in the official Church: [Msgr. Thaddeus Ma Daqin](#), bishop of Shanghai, since 2012 in isolation and under house arrest for having dared to leave the Patriotic Association; [Fr. Liu Jiangdong, of Zhengzhou](#) (Henan), expelled from his parish in October 2018 and forbidden to live as a priest, for having dared to organize meetings with young people even under the age of 18.

For all of this, since February 2018 many communities have been forcibly closed, [convents](#) and places of worship destroyed with bulldozers, [including some shrines](#) in Shanxi and Guizhou. It is estimated that in 2018 at least 30 Catholic churches have been closed and destroyed.

But there are also churches (official) that are destroyed in the name of urban expansion – as in [Qianwang and Liangwang \(Shandong\)](#) – and whose land is seized for building development without any compensation.

***In the name of nationalist patriotism***

Another method of submission and elimination of Catholics is nationalist patriotism, or “sinicization”. According to the dictates of Xi Jinping, the Church must not only assimilate Chinese culture, and express its creed with Chinese categories, but must create theologies, history, works of art according to the dictates of Chinese culture. Again it falls to the Patriotic Association to verify this is being done.

But the race for inculturation has also become iconoclasm with the destruction of works of art from the past (“too Western”) and that of external and internal church decoration, the demolition of crosses from bell towers, the destruction of domes and facades considered “not Chinese in style”. Patriotism obliges communities to hoist the Chinese flag on every religious building, to sing patriotic hymns before services, to hang a portrait of Xi Jinping even on the altars.

The provisional agreement between China and the Holy See, signed on September 22nd 2018, has not changed this situation. It is true that in some ways, the agreement is a conquest because for the first time in modern China history the Pope is recognized as head of the Catholic Church in China.

However, last December, Wang Zuoran, deputy chief of the United Front and former director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, once again stressed that the principles of independence and self-management will not be eliminated “at any time and under any circumstances”.

In words reportedly shared with one [of these] underground bishop [s], the Pope is said to have referred that if the agreement was not signed, China threatened to illegally ordain 45 bishops “independent” from the Holy See, creating the basis for a real schism. The agreement was therefore blackmail.

In addition, immediately after the signing of the agreement, in many regions of China the United Front and the Patriotic Association held rallies for priests and bishops explaining to

them that [“despite the agreement”, they had to work for the implementation of an independent Church](#). The destruction of crosses, churches, indoctrination sessions, arrests continued just as before the agreement, if not worse.

#### ***Four conclusions***

1. It is clear that the government and the Chinese Communist Party are engaged in a real religious war to oust the God of Christians and replace Him with the god-Xi Jinping, which implies a total submission to the Communist Party, a condition included in the New Regulations to nurture religion in China. In the name of the sinicization and subjugation religions are distorted until they become simple instruments of collateral support to the Party.
2. What happens to Catholics, also happens to civil society and the business world. In recent years, control of media, social networks, the population, NGOs has grown ... and even in the business world, submission to the Party is required, on fear of kidnappings, arrests and convictions.
3. China ploughs ahead undisturbed trampling on religious rights, civil society and commerce thanks to the indifference of the international community or the servility of many states which in view of possible, rapid economic gains with the Chinese market, turn a blind eye to these violations.
4. The international community and the Chinese government suffer from myopia: they do not realize that religions – not only Catholicism and Protestantism – are spreading ever more rapidly just as esteem for Party politics is diminishing. The result is an erosion of Chinese society and a greater need for political and economic reforms. Ensuring religious freedom for Christian communities and other faiths could help China to achieve greater cohesion by saving it from chaos.

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# **RUSSIA: Roman Catholic leader raises concern that his people may be treated like Jehovah's Witnesses**

*General secretary of Conference of Catholic Bishops of Russia criticizes ban of Jehovah's Witnesses*

SKGNews (02.05.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2qLcYUh> – The Catholic church of Russia condemned the decision of the Supreme Court banning the Jehovah's Witnesses and it warned that this step increases the worries relative to new restrictions with respect to Catholics' rights.

“Churches such as ours do not regard Jehovah's Witnesses to be Christian and we do not engage in dialogue with them, but we must distinguish theological problems from legal rights,” declared the general secretary of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Russia, Monsignor Igor Kovalevsky.

“The situation in Russia now is complex and difficult. Catholics have very strong worries that we also may be faced, if not with persecution then at least with new manifestations of discrimination and restrictions of our freedom of religious confession,” he said.

By the decision of the Supreme Court of 20 April, Jehovah's Witnesses were called an “extremist organization” and sentenced to confiscation of the property belonging to this organization throughout the country.

As Msgr. Kovalevsky reported to a correspondent of the news



agency "Catholic News Service," it is not clear to the Catholic church which actions may be considered "extremist," adding that all religious groups have the right "to exist and to develop in the Russian federation," if they do not violate the law. "The law should be fairly applied to all . . . . A law may be severe, but it is the law as before. I think that the government is obliged to give to everyone a clear explanation about why this group was liquidated," Msgr. Kovalevsky said.

The Jehovah's Witnesses were registered in Russia in 1991 and reregistered in 1999, but they have been subjected to regular arrests and police raids for passing out leaflets and witnessing "from door to door." Their members have been subjected to attack and their property has been damaged by vandals.

A ruling of the Supreme Court established fines of up to 10,700 USA dollars and up to 10 years incarceration for anyone who will be involved in the activity of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Msgr. Kovalevsky said that although there are no signs that the Catholic church will be treated as the Jehovah's Witnesses were, "the government should assure citizens that freedom of conscience remains intact."

"Jehovah's Witnesses have the same right to protect their dignity and faith as do other citizens," he said. "Although protecting human rights is not our main task, the Catholic church defends the right of each person to freedom of conscience." (tr. by PDS, posted 2 May 2017)

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## **WORLD: 28 Catholic pastoral care workers killed in 2016**

Agenzia Fides (30.12.2016) – <http://bit.ly/2iuGUQB> – In the year 2016, 28 Catholic pastoral care workers were killed worldwide. For the eighth consecutive year, the place most affected, with an extremely elevated number of pastoral care workers killed is AMERICA, 9 in 2016, more than double the number compared to 2015.

According to information gathered by Agenzia Fides, in 2016 14 priests, 9 religious women, one seminarian, 4 lay people died violently. In America 12 pastoral care workers were killed (9 priests and 3 religious sisters); in Africa 8 pastoral care workers were killed (3 priests, 2 nuns, one seminarian, 2 lay people); in Asia 7 pastoral care workers were killed (1 priest, 4 nuns, 2 lay people); in Europe one priest was killed.

Once again the majority of the pastoral care workers in 2016 were killed in attempted robbery, and in some cases violently attacked, a sign of the climate of moral decline, economic and cultural poverty, which generates violence and disregard for human life.

In these situations, the priests, religious sisters and lay people who were killed, were among those who loudly denounced injustice, corruption, poverty, in the name of the Gospel. Fr. José Luis Sánchez Ruiz, of the Diocese of San Andres Tuxtla (Veracruz, Mexico) was one of the victims who was kidnapped and then released with "obvious signs of torture", according to a statement from the diocese. In the days before the kidnapping he had received threats, surely for his harsh criticism against corruption and rampant crime (see Fides 14/11/2016). As Pope Francis recalled on the feast of the protomartyr St. Stephen, "the world hates Christians for the same reason it hated Jesus because He brought the light of God and the world prefers the darkness to hide its wicked works". (Angelus 26/12/2016).

They all lived in these human and social contexts, administering the sacraments, helping the poor, taking care of orphans and drug addicts, following development projects or simply opening the door of their home to anyone. And some were murdered by the same people who they helped. Hardly any investigations conducted by the local authorities lead to identifying the perpetrators and the instigators of these killings or the reasons why they were carried out.

There is still much concern regarding the fate of other pastoral care workers kidnapped or have disappeared, of whom we have not had any news.

As it has been for some time, Fides' list does not only include missionaries ad gentes in the strict sense, but all pastoral care workers who died violent deaths. We do not propose to use the term "martyrs", if not in its etymological meaning of "witnesses" since it is up to the Church to judge their possible merits and also because of the scarcity of available information in most cases, with regard to their life and even the circumstances of their death.

The provisional list compiled annually by Agenzia Fides, must

therefore be added to the long list of many of whom there may never be news, who in every corner of the world suffer and even pay with their lives for their faith in Christ. Pope Francis often reminds us that “Today there are Christians who are murdered, tortured, imprisoned, slaughtered because they do not deny Jesus Christ” ... “the martyrs of today are more numerous than those of the first centuries”.

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**FRANCE: 339 anti-Catholic incidents in eleven months in France**



Source [<http://infos-bordeaux.fr/>].

HRWF (07.12.2016) – In October – November, the *Observatoire de la Christianophobie* reported and documented a total of 23 anti-Catholic incidents in 19 different places. For the first 11 months of the year, the same observatory recorded 339 anti-Catholic incidents perpetrated in 70 different *départements*.

During the night of 2-3 December, anti-Christian graffiti was tagged on the walls of the Catholic seminary of Bordeaux: “Neither nor Master”, “I love Satan”, and an untranslatable sexual insult. This form of hate speech is typical of extreme-left slogans.

It is not the first time that extreme-left activists target symbolic places related to the Catholic Church in Bordeaux. Alain Juppé, who lost the primaries of the upcoming presidential elections against François Fillon, is the mayor of Bordeaux. He is not known to have condemned such an act. Other politicians have not reacted either, and the media has ignored the incident.

On 3 December and over the last few weeks, anti-Catholic anarchist slogans were tagged several times on St. Clement church in Nantes.

Such incidents are rarely reported in the mainstream media. They are only published in local newspapers or publications with limited circulation.

Sources :

[Infos-Bordeaux](#)

[Observatoire de la Christianophobie](#)

[Breizh-Info](#)

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# CHINA: An open letter to Pope Francis on China

By Benedict Rogers

Huffpost Politics (07.11.2016) – <http://huff.to/2fFI7TL> –

Dear Holy Father,

Like every true Catholic in the world, I love you and respect your authority as the Successor of St Peter.

Like a great many people in the world, well beyond the Catholic Church, I recognise the beautiful message you, as Pope Francis, bring to the world.

And as a new Catholic who came into the Church little over ten days after your election to the papacy, my Catholic faith is inspired and intertwined with your pontificate.

I became a Catholic on Palm Sunday, 2013, received into the Church by Burma's first-ever Cardinal Charles Maung Bo. Although I am British, I became a Catholic in an Asian country emerging from dictatorship, inspired by a Church that has endured decades of persecution. I have also lived in China and Hong Kong, and have come to know and love Cardinal Joseph Zen, whose story is told, along with my other heroes, in my book *From Burma to Rome*, which I had the privilege of presenting to you when we met in August.

For all these reasons – because I love you, Holy Father, because I love the Church, because I love the people of China and Asia, because I love Cardinal Zen, and most of all because I love God and our Lord Jesus Christ – I humbly appeal to you to reconsider your proposed agreement with the Communist regime in China: before it is too late.

Over the past three years, the human rights situation in China has deteriorated dramatically. Hundreds of human rights

lawyers, many of them Christians, have been detained, simply for defending freedom of religion and freedom of conscience cases. Thousands of Christian crosses have been destroyed. Many Christian clergy, Catholic and Protestant, remain in jail or harassed. Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims and Falun Gong practitioners continue to be persecuted. Allegations of forced organ harvesting – targeting prisoners of conscience – persist. Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Liu Xiaobo remains in jail. Hong Kong's freedoms are now in tatters.

Earlier this year, the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission in the United Kingdom published an in-depth report, *The Darkest Moment: The Crackdown on Human Rights in China 2013-2016*. It was launched by the former Governor of Hong Kong Lord Patten, himself a Catholic, in June, and includes testimonies from Hong Kong democrats Martin Lee and Anson Chan, both Catholics.

Holy Father, you will be well aware of the arguments made by Cardinal Zen, which I need not repeat. I simply say that at this time, human rights are deteriorating drastically in China and I don't believe it is the time to compromise. At a time when religious freedom overall in China is being further restricted, when other religions are being severely persecuted, when organs may be being harvested, when lawyers are being harassed, when freedom of expression is being denied, now is not the time to seek a special arrangement for the Catholic Church. Now is not the time to kowtow.

Furthermore, while I am a very new Catholic, and so I write with all appropriate humility, two of the things that attracted me into the Church are the Church's commitment to justice and human rights, as set out in the Compendium of the



Social Doctrine of the Church, and the Apostolic Succession. That means the Church must take a stand against Xi Jinping's brutality as it did against Caesar's, Stalin's and Hitler's. And it means that it cannot settle for anything less than complete Papal authority over episcopal and priestly appointments in China. I don't know what deal might be about to be agreed, but I find it hard to imagine Beijing agreeing to this. If it does, then I welcome it. But if not, I urge you to reject the deal. How can bishops appointed by a communist, corrupt, cruel and brutal regime be acceptable to the Church founded by Jesus Christ?

Instead of compromise with Beijing, I urge you – Holy Father – to follow in the footsteps of the Apostles, and lead a revolution for peaceful change in China.

With humble, sincere prayers from a relatively new Catholic,

Benedict Rogers