



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on April 5, 2018

China Bans Bible Sales at Online Bookstores and Tightens Control Over Religion

The communist government of China has recently taken firmer steps to maintain control over religion, including banning the sale of Bibles at online bookstores across the country. An April 5 report from CNN noted that China has always controlled sales of the Bible by allowing Bibles to be distributed and printed only by state-sanctioned churches. Despite these controls, in recent years the Chinese have been able to buy Bibles online.



However, observed CNN, that loophole now appears to be firmly closed. The report noted that searches for “Holy Bible” did not return results on JD.com, and results on Amazon.cn did not include the main text of the Bible, although they did locate study guides and the Koran. (Amazon.cn is a Chinese online shopping website located in Beijing, China, that was acquired by Amazon in 2004.)

CNN reports that a search for the Bible on Taobao, China’s biggest online marketplace, returned results for the “baby food bible” and the “autoimmune disease healing bible,” but not the Christian scripture. However, it noted that some Bible-related products such as an illustrated set of children’s Bible stories were still available. When we searched Taobao for “Bible” we also found Luther’s Bible of 1534, which is printed in German.

The CNN report also quoted Sarah Cook, senior research analyst for East Asia at Freedom House, who said the sales ban “is an important example of how internet censorship intersects with restrictions on religious freedom.”

“Sensitive religious topics and groups are among the most censored in China,” said Cook. “In our research we found the Chinese authorities increasingly using more high-tech methods to control religion and punish believers — including surveillance and arrest of believers for sharing information online.”

An April 5 report in Australia’s ABC News (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) connected the timing of the Chinese government’s apparent removal of the Bibles from online bookshops on March 30 to an April 3 press conference, during which Chinese officials release a white paper entitled “China’s Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Belief.”

ABC News, Australia observed: “But at nearly the same time the paper was released, Chinese social media users began noticing that Bibles were disappearing online.”

We have reviewed the text of the Chinese government’s a white paper (which is available [online](#)) and to the person who does not delve deeply enough to parse its complete meaning, it may appear to provide for freedom of religion. For example, its preamble states:

As a socialist country under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC), China adopts policies on freedom of religious belief based on national and religious conditions to protect citizens’



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right to freedom of religious belief, build active and healthy religious relationships, and maintain religious and social harmony.

The document goes on to claim: “Respecting and protecting freedom of religious belief is a basic policy of the CPC and the Chinese government.” However, everyone familiar with Orwell’s dystopian novel *1984* understands how a totalitarian socialist government can control its population by manipulating the language. In *1984*, the English socialist (“Ingsoc”) government invented its own language called Newspeak, which often substituted meanings for words that were the opposite of what they conventionally meant. For example, the Party created the slogans “War is peace.” “Freedom is slavery,” and “Ignorance is strength.”

However, the CPC and the Chinese government of today is more sophisticated than the fictional party of Big Brother in *1984* and couches its mandates in more subtle language. Nevertheless, they are there for those who make sufficient effort to analyze the whitepaper.

The paper, put out by the State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, states: “Religious groups and religious affairs are not subject to control by foreign countries; this principle is enshrined in the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China.” This immediately presents a problem for Chinese Catholics, since the Vatican is universally recognized as a sovereign (“foreign,” as far as China is concerned) country.

The paper continues: “This principle is a historic choice made by Chinese religious believers in the Chinese people’s struggle for national independence and social progress, as Catholicism and Protestantism, which were known as foreign religions in China, had long been controlled and utilized by colonialists and imperialists.”

In the case of the practice of the Catholic faith in China, the communist government has sought to control Chinese Catholics by insisting on the right to name their bishops. Catholic bishops who have been legitimately named by the Vatican are forced to operate as a parallel “underground” church. A report in the *New York Times* on April 3 noted:

China will not allow any foreign interference in religious affairs in the country, a senior official said on [April 3], dousing expectations of an imminent deal with the Vatican over control of the Roman Catholic Church here.

“I think there is no religion in human society that is above the state,” the official, Chen Zongrong, said during a briefing on religious affairs in China, underscoring the government’s intention to maintain strict control over all religious organizations and their believers.

Some statements in the Chinese government’s whitepaper clearly reveal its intent to control the practice of religion in China, once one interprets its “Newspeak.” For example:

- “The State requires the registration of places of worship for group religious activities in accordance with the law, so as to provide legal protection and ensure that all activities are carried out in an orderly manner.”

Interpretation: The State requires the registration of places of worship for group religious activities so as to ensure that all activities are carried out in a manner that does not threaten the communist regime.

- “Religious texts and literature are published as prescribed by the law.”

Interpretation: Religious texts and literature are published under government scrutiny so that they may be edited by government censors.



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- “Chinese religious groups must conduct religious activities in the Chinese context, practice core socialist values, carry forward the fine traditions of the Chinese nation, and actively explore religious thought which conforms to the reality in China.”

Interpretation: Chinese religious groups must conduct religious activities in conformity with Chinese government restrictions, practice socialist values, and actively explore religious thought which conforms to the reality of communist rule in China.

This last proscription clearly would establish an impossible moral dilemma for any Catholic who adheres to what was taught by Pope Pius XI in his encyclical “*Quadragesimo Anno*,” on May 15, 1931: “Religious socialism, Christian socialism, are contradictory terms; no one can be at the same time a good Catholic and a true Socialist.”

Christians of other faith traditions have also found their faith to be irreconcilable with communism and socialism. The Christian minister Richard Wurmbrand (author of *Tortured for Christ*) publicly said communism and Christianity were not compatible. As a result, he experienced imprisonment and torture by the then-communist regime of Romania for his beliefs.

The CPC and the Chinese government may claim that there is religious freedom in China. But Christians in China are free to live in peace only if they are willing to compromise their beliefs and submit to the government’s control. A Pius XI or a Wurmbrand would not be content to submit to such compromise.

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