



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on January 6, 2015

Chinese Persecution of Christians on the Rise During Holidays

In China, where religious liberty has been under attack since the communist takeover in 1949, persecution of Christians has escalated over recent months. Communist Chinese authorities have destroyed churches and religious symbols and arrested Christian leaders and laity in recent crackdowns against those groups regarded by Beijing as “cults.”



Many of these so-called cults are churches that have not previously been considered cults. “Chinese authorities continued to harass, detain, imprison, and interfere with the religious activities of members of both registered and unregistered Protestant communities who ran afoul of government or party policy,” said U.S. Representative Chris Smith (R-N.J.) in a joint press event with Senator Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio).

Churches have been singled out for erecting crosses and other religious images. In some cases, authorities have torn the crosses down. In other cases, they have destroyed entire churches. [Yahoo reports](#), “Provincial authorities have toppled crosses from more than 400 churches, and even razed some worship halls in a province-wide crackdown on building code violations.”

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Protestants are not suffering alone. Catholics in China have not been spared the undue attention of communist persecution, either. Smith also said, “The Patriotic Church, the Catholic Church, they are being targeted with church demolitions and other kinds of repression which we have not seen before. So there’s a great deal of concern that religious freedom, as bad as it was, has further deteriorated in China.” The senator’s remarks are based on a recent report by the Congressional-Executive Commission on China.

The report also says that Chinese “authorities continued to harass Catholics who practice their faith outside of state-approved parameters.” That is because those parameters are not clearly outlined and simply meeting to discuss religion can be interpreted as a violation of the law. The Catholic News Agency [reported](#), “Among the incidents of harassment in the past year were the reported detainment of two underground Catholic priests for ‘organizing adult catechism classes’ and fines levied against laymen supporting the priests’ efforts.”

Beijing and the Vatican have a long-standing disagreement over the appointment of bishops. The Vatican holds to the Catholic teaching that the pope holds that authority, while Beijing says that to have a foreign power appoint those leaders violates Chinese sovereignty. This has led to an unusual situation



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for Catholics in China, with some bishops having been appointed by the government and others appointed by the pope. The communist government refuses to recognize those bishops appointed by Rome and considers them and the priests under them to be illegal. The Vatican recognizes the validity of bishops appointed without the pope's approval, but considers them to be illicit. The result is that in China there is a distinction made between the Patriotic Church — with government appointed bishops — and the Underground Catholic Church — with bishops chosen by the pope. Until recently, the Patriotic Church has been spared the persecution that the Underground Church has been experiencing all along. Now that has shifted.

While Chinese Christians have been persecuted, in one form or another, since the communists took over the mainland of China at the end of WWII, these recent episodes are evidence of increased hostility toward religion. Coming at the Christmas season, the increase in persecution hits believers even harder. Many Christians have been detained at the time of year that both Protestants and Catholics consider to be sacred.

China has plans to publish an online list of “legal religious venues,” according to another [report](#) by Yahoo. Of course, any venue not listed would be illegal. That would mean that Christians found worshipping in one of these illegal churches will be treated as a cult and could be imprisoned for up to seven years. These are bad times for Chinese Christians, and we would all do well to pray for them.



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