Communist China Prohibiting Children From Converting to Christian Faith

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In its efforts to curb the rapid expansion of the Christian faith across communist China, the Beijing government is ramping up its enforcement of a law, long on the books, forbidding children from converting to Christianity before the age of 18.

Erik Burklin of China Partner, an organization that trains Chinese Christian leaders, told MissionNetworkNews.com that the law specifies that "you cannot proselytize or you cannot convert somebody under the age of 18." Burklin said that before the law was enforced, "people were having their children come to church and many churches started what we would call Sunday school classes. They would use that time to teach children Bible verses and teach them Christian songs and so forth."

With the recent crackdown, however, "many churches have been notified by Religious Affairs Bureau heads that they can no longer conduct Sunday school classes in their churches. They even put signage up in the entrance of some churches to indicate that."

Burklin said that the law has made the efforts of his organization, which emphasizes training young people for ministry and church leadership, much more difficult. He told MissionNetworkNews.com that as staff of China Partner were conducting youth ministry training in China recently, they were approached by pastors with whom they had worked for many years. "They specifically came back to us saying, 'Please, we can no longer invite you to come and do these youth ministry trainings for us because we need to adhere to this new enforcement of this law,'" Burklin recalled.

Tom Nettleton of Voice of the Martyrs, an organization that monitors persecution against Christians around the world, noted, "The Bible says train up a child in the way they should go and when they are old, they will not depart from it. The Chinese government, the Communist Party leaders, are very aware of that as well, and they want to train up a child to be a good Communist. And so churches that operate schools … have been targeted by the Chinese government. They are even looking at how parents are raising their children."

Nettleton observed that the enforcement of the law against children becoming Christians "is part of a broader picture in China right now of a concerted effort to control all religious expression. Every aspect of the church, whether it be a registered church or an unregistered, is under the scrutiny of the Communist government. They are trying to bring every aspect of religious expression under their communist control."

BitterWinter.com, which monitors religious liberty and human rights in China, recently reported that since the communist government implemented its Regulations on Religious Affairs in 2018, children are increasingly being prohibited from attending places of worship, and "schools around China have

adopted unprecedented measures to keep students away from the matters of faith. The grooming of atheists starts at an early age — from kindergartens and primary schools."

According to Bitter Winter, under the regulations "children are taught to oppose their religious relatives, [and] suffer great psychological stress out of fear that their parents or loved ones could be arrested because they go to church."

One Christian Chinese mother told Bitter Winter: "Before starting school, I told my child about God's creation, and he believed it. But after being taught at school, my child is like a different person. In atheistic China, these pure and innocent children have been taught to hate God."

The Trump administration has been vocal in its support of the Church in China, and in its condemnation of China's aggressive persecution of Christians. At a U.S. State Department sponsored conference in July, entitled the Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo charged that China is "home to one of the worst human rights crises of our time. It is truly the stain of the century."

Addressing the conference, Vice President Mike Pence said that while communist authorities have worked diligently to stop the spread of the Christian faith across China, "in one of the greatest ironies in the history of Christianity, in today's Communist China, we actually see the fastest growth in the Christian faith that we have ever seen anywhere on earth in the last 2,000 years."

Pence added that "just 70 years ago, when the Communist Party took power, there were fewer than half a million Chinese Christians. Yet today, just two generations later, faith in Jesus Christ has reached as many as 130 million Chinese Christians."

Speaking on behalf of President Trump, the vice president declared that the "American people will always stand in solidarity with the people of all faiths in the People's Republic of China. And we will pray for the day that they can live out their faith freely, without fear of persecution."

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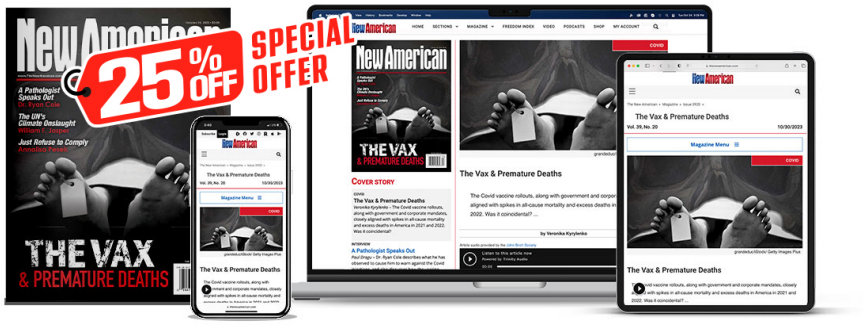

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