

PROTESTANT CHURCH IN CHINA UPDATES

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2 Updates

1.

Conservatism of biblical proportions

South China Morning Post

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Alex Lo

OPINION

Chief executive wannabe Henry Tang Ying-yen might have enjoyed the first edition of the King James Bible. The first prints were full of errors, such as in Exodus 20:14. With a crucial word missing, the seventh commandment became: "Thou shalt commit adultery."

The King James celebrates its 400th anniversary this year. Talk about God, it seems, is back with a vengeance. Newspapers around the world devote a surprising amount of space to news about religion. Publishers seem to think books with God in the title promote sales, especially if written by scientists.

Meanwhile, China has become a huge faith market. Like every other multinational corporation, the Vatican has set its sights on China with its 1.3 billion potential consumers of faith. Underground Protestant churches spring up on the mainland like mushrooms after a spring shower. If Nietzsche were alive today, he might have to revise his most famous slogan to the far less catchy "God is back".

Now in the twilight of his career, Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam-kuen has repeatedly affirmed his government work with his Catholic belief. When the public was up in arms against his choice of the hugely unpopular Stephen Lam Sui-lung as chief secretary, Tsang's defence was that Lam was a good Christian. When Tang confessed to having "strayed" from the straight and narrow path of marital fidelity, Tsang called for public forgiveness as a Christian value.

Christine Loh Kung-wai of the Civic Exchange was breathless about the supposedly understated influence of godless communism in her book *Underground Front: The Chinese Communist Party in Hong Kong*.

What may be far more worrying is the disproportionate number of conservative, almost fundamentalist, Christians in the top ranks of government, which at least partly accounts for its profound conservatism, love of the status quo and inability to adjust to rapid social changes.

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2.

Chinese prison Bible to be displayed in U.S.

Ecumenical News International

By Sudeshna Sarkar

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Daily News Service

Part of a fading Bible, painstakingly and secretly hand-copied by a group of Christians sentenced to a labor camp in China, will now be on display at the George W. Bush Institute in Dallas, the institute announced.

A manuscript of the Book of Revelations was given on 2 November to former president George W. Bush by ChinaAid Association, a Pennsylvania-based non-profit organization that monitors the state of religious freedom in China, especially the condition of banned churches run secretly in private homes.

The Chinese Bible was assembled more than a decade ago by a group of nearly 20 Christians who were sent to a labor camp in northwest China after being arrested from an early morning prayer service, ChinaAid president and founder Xiqu "Bob" Fu said in a statement.

One of the inmates managed to smuggle a Bible inside and the prisoners began to copy it by hand. "These hand-copied Bibles were used ... for more than a year, sustaining the faith of these prisoners who read them ... in the dark of night," Fu said. "On the eve of the prisoners' release, the text was smuggled out of the labor camp to prevent it from being confiscated."

The manuscript will be displayed as part of the Bush Institute's Freedom Collection, a repository of video histories and documents from "hallmark freedom movements."

The gift comes at the same time as a delegation led by the China Christian Council (CCC) is touring the U.S. with an exhibition on how the Bible came to China. The exhibit, titled "Thy Word is the Truth," has visited Washington, D.C.; Chicago and Dallas and will be in Charlotte, North Carolina from 8 to 18 November.

While the CCC says Christians are not persecuted in China, ChinaAid has called the exhibition propaganda "to convince the American people that freedom of religion exists in China."

According to Fu's testimony before the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs, released by ChinaAid on 3 November, freedom of religion and rule of law in China reached the lowest level in the first 10 months of 2011 since 1982.

"While the government tolerates the practice of religion within officially controlled organizations and has permitted some discussion about allowing 'faith-based' charity work ... (it) controls and represses any religion that does not 'adapt' its practices to socialism, has extensive foreign ties, or is viewed as a potential threat to the ruling Communist Party," Fu said.

This includes "house church" Protestants, unregistered Catholics, Tibetan Buddhists, Uyghur Muslims, and groups such as Falun Gong. ChinaAid said this year more than 15,000 members of nearly 30 house churches and nearly 100 lawyers, rights activists and dissidents have been harassed, arrested or sentenced to prison.

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