

Chairman Gallagher Keynote Address
Keynote Address at National Prayer Breakfast Opening Dinner
2.1.24
as prepared for delivery

I recently heard a story about a young man, a graduate student from the PRC, and a quiet opponent of the regime.

When asked why he opposed the CCP, he answered simply, I have faith.

He didn't mean faith in democracy, or faith in the future, though he may well have had faith in those things too. He meant faith in God. And he was eager to explain why, in his view, the CCP was so hell bent on destroying faith.

If they can stamp out our belief in anything greater, he said, life becomes about nothing more than the incentives the Party can offer and the punishments it can deliver.

This is the Chinese Communist Party's goal.

Reduce men and women to flesh and blood and bones, simple tools to use to fulfill Party objectives, sacrificed, or disposed of at will.

Because for the Chinese Communist Party, a proudly Marxist-Leninist regime that sees itself as Stalin's rightful heir (you heard that right, Stalin.), individuals do not have inherent worth. Chairman Mao famously remarked, "I'm not afraid of nuclear war...China has a population of 600 million; even if half of them are killed, there are still 300 million people left."

The Party does not exist to serve the people, the people exist to serve the Party, even if only as cannon fodder.

And to serve the Party properly — to be willing to be yoked and used — people need to be controlled, body and soul.

That is why the CCP spends more each year on “internal security” than on its military.

That is why they have built the most powerful propaganda and censorship system in history to control everything that is read and said.

And that is why, as this young Chinese man explained, the CCP is desperate to crush religion. Because the very concept of an individual with dignity and worth must be destroyed, and religion is its most vehement defender.

So for decades, they tried, mightily, desperately, to destroy belief in God entirely.

The CCP has imprisoned believers en masse. Tortured them. Sent millions of Uyghurs, Falun Gong, and other religious minorities to re-education camps. The genocide against the Uyghur people includes the largest internment of an ethno-religious minority since the Holocaust.

It has destroyed Buddhist statues, bulldozed monasteries, destroyed Mosques and churches, used artillery to shell holy sites in Lhasa — and tried to kill the Dalai Lama.

It has ripped millions of Tibetan children from their parents, many as young as 3 years old, and sent them to colonial boarding schools in order to destroy their faith and sense of self.

But despite its efforts, the CCP failed. Because you cannot kill the truth.

The Soviets learned this lesson the hard way. 32 years into their own war against religion, hundreds of thousands chanted “We want God!” as they gathered to see Karol Wojtyla, now Pope Saint John Paul II, celebrate Mass near Krakow, Poland, in June 1979.

So what has the CCP done in the face of failure? Given up? No.

Rather, the CCP has pivoted — in a pattern that you see repeated whenever the Party is presented with a force too powerful to destroy — to a more insidious and more dangerous tactic: co-optation, or as Chairman Xi calls it “the sinicization of Chinese religions.”

Instead of destroying it, the CCP has decided to harness religion as a tool to control people's minds.

What does Xi Jinping's quest to make the faithful serve the party rather than God look like?

It looks like, in churches across Henan province, local CCP officials replacing the Ten Commandments with Xi Jinping quotes. "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me," became diktats like: "Resolutely guard against the infiltration of Western ideology."

Let me translate: Xi Jinping has no problem with the first commandment, just so long as he and the CCP are playing the role of God.

It looks like a CCTV camera in every house of worship, letting the faithful know their every word is being monitored.

It looks like a 10 year project to rewrite the Bible, the Quran, and other sacred texts, in a way that flips their very meaning.

Take for example, the Gospel of John, in which Jesus famously defends a woman caught committing adultery against her accusers, saying "let he among you without sin cast the first stone". The chastened accusers slink away and Jesus says to the woman, "Has no one condemned you? Then neither do I condemn you. Go forth and sin no more." A beautiful story of forgiveness and mercy. Unless you're a CCP official. Then it's a story of a dissident challenging the authority of the State.

How did the CCP deal with this? The new "sinicized" version has the rewritten Gospel of John excerpt ending, not with mercy, but with Jesus himself stoning the adulterous woman to death.

The CCP has also seized control of the selection of religious leaders, and throws anyone opposed in jail.

The CCP has even managed, through a secret 2018 deal with the Pope, to control the nomination of Catholic bishops — in practice, tantamount to appointing them. Avowedly atheist party members in Beijing notify the Vatican of their choices; Francis provides a rubber stamp — a shocking way to decide upon the consecrated successors to Jesus’ apostles.

This capitulation by the Pope has been a disaster for other faiths in China. The CCP has leveraged the deal to pressure other religions to allow Beijing to appoint their leaders. Notably, it has bolstered its long standing attempt to — after failing to kill the Dalai Lama decades ago — to coerce Tibetan Buddhists into accepting the CCP’s choice of successor to the Dalai Lama.

I am telling you these stories because I believe that the CCP’s approach toward religion offers us some crucial insights.

The first is of the true nature of the CCP. They do not believe in individual dignity. They reject the inherent worth and preciousness of each individual. They do not believe men and women are made in the image of god. For the CCP, humans are material objects to be used for whatever purposes the Party deems appropriate.

The problem for the Party is that these things are not true and they have never been true.

And that leads us to the second insight: the key to the CCP’s eventual unraveling.

In 1979, Pope John Paul II knew that the power of communism in Poland lay not in Soviet tanks but in the acceptance of the lies that drove them. Destroy the lies, and China’s tanks, too, will rust in fields. The same is true today.

It is that divine truth that gives people the clarity to see evil — and the courage, in the words of John Paul to the faithful behind the Iron Curtain, to “Be not afraid.”

As the pastor of one Chinese church stated, “In this war, in Xinjiang, in Shanghai, in Beijing, in Chengdu, the rulers have chosen an enemy that can never be imprisoned – the soul of man... [and they] are doomed to lose.”

That is an assessment that we must make come true.

After that dinner with the young man I spoke about earlier, I went home and I prayed. That night I had a thought.

We're taught in political science classes that the opposite of far-left Communist Totalitarianism is Capitalist Democracy. But maybe that's wrong.

Maybe the opposite of Communism isn't a political-economic system at all, because Communism itself is not a political-economic system - it is a perverted, inverse religion, an all-consuming ideology imposed not by free belief but by force and indoctrination. Its churches are the labor camps, the gulags, the reeducation centers. Its confession booths are torture chambers. Its priests are the censors, the propagandists, the secret police.

Maybe the opposite of Communism is faith in God.

Communism seeks domination - faith seeks love. Communism seeks the obliteration of the individual on the altar of the collective - faith seeks the dignity of the individual, the respect due to each and everyone one of us as a child of God. Faith seeks the elevation of man's soul - communism seeks its abasement

The essence of Marxism is class struggle - pitting different elements of society against one another. Mutual suspicion, neighbor against neighbor. Mao took this to a new level with his doctrine of "continuous revolution" - ever-escalating purges of those deemed counter-revolutionary, which even led to hundreds of "rightists" being literally eaten by crazed Maoists in Guanxi during the Cultural Revolution.

But there is a commandment that is fatal to this dark world order: "Love one another, as I have loved you." If we follow that commandment, how could we inform on our neighbors? How could we purge our adversaries? How could we tolerate the gulags, the labor camps, the reeducation centers?

The Soviet dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn, himself a long-time incarcerated at one of Stalin's gulags, perhaps put it best.

“While I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of old people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia: "Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened." Since then I have spent well-nigh 50 years working on the history of our revolution; in the process I have read hundreds of books, collected hundreds of personal testimonies, and have already contributed eight volumes of my own toward the effort of clearing away the rubble left by that upheaval. But if I were asked today to formulate as concisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous revolution that swallowed up some 60 million of our people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat: "Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened.”

The opposite of communism is not capitalism. It is not democracy. It is faith in God.

Our long term “strategic competition” with the Chinese Communist Party is not a test of different socio-economic systems. It is a struggle for souls.