

RELIGION IN CHINA TODAY

Notes For Address By
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The topic this afternoon is the government treatment of the practising members of the estimated 300 million Chinese indicated by a widely-reported opinion survey as self-identifying as “religious”. I’ll not deal here with other persecuted communities in the Middle Kingdom, including Tibetans, Uighurs, democrats, journalists, human rights advocates (such as Gao Zhishen), and internet users. Nor will I deal with religious oppression in regimes protected by the government of China in the UN Security Council, such as Sudan, Burma/Myanmar, Zimbabwe and North Korea.

My own respect for the peoples of China and their long history, culture, scholarship and myriad other accomplishments is deep. During two years as Canada’s Secretary of State for the Asia-Pacific in 2003-2003, I visited various regions of China and this only increased my admiration. It was also my good fortune to represent in Canada’s national Parliament for almost 27 years some of the approximately one million Canadians of origin in China, who are evidently now the best-educated ethno-cultural community in our country.

Here in Europe, permit me to give tribute to Will Hutton, who recently published an excellent book on China, *The Writing On The Wall-China and The West In The 21st Century*. It argues convincingly that the new century can belong in large measure to China, but only if new leaders there embrace economic and political pluralism, including democratic governance, restored private ownership of land, independent courts and the rule of law, and the basic freedoms of any well-functioning civilization.

Hutton concludes, however, that unless China modernizes in such important spheres its internal problems in such areas as social inequality (greater than both the UK and US for example), unemployment, widespread corruption, pollution of the natural environment (twenty of the 24 most polluted cities on earth are in China) and general societal discontent, could bring an early end its export successes of recent decades, thereby derailing much of the world economy. He wants the democratic world to assist the next generation of leaders in Beijing (Like many, Hutton has little confidence in President Hu as a reformer.) to avoid collapse. The key is governance reform because approximately two thirds of the world’s countries are now democratic and China’s one party state is increasingly out of sync with its trading partners.

Case of Falun Gong

The essentially totalitarian form of government still operating in China explains, for example, what has happened-and continues to occur- to the vital organs of thousands of members of the Falun Gong spiritual community across China. The government itself estimated the movement to comprise about 70 million Chinese nationals as of 1999. As Hutton, who unfortunately does not deal with the organs issue in his book, points out, since 1949 other terrible things have been done regularly to the population of China by their own government.

During Mao's period alone, an estimated 70 million Chinese citizens perished as a direct or indirect result of inhuman policies such as the "Great Leap Forward" and the "Cultural Revolution".

As the Matas-Kilgour report, "Bloody Harvest: Revised Report into Allegations of Organ Harvesting of Falun Gong Practitioners in China (available on the internet at organharvestinvestigation.net) explains in detail, in mid-1999 the government of Jiang Zemin declared a savage internal war on the Falun Gong community. He no doubt feared its rapidly growing popularity across China as a spiritual-exercise movement deeply-rooted in the qigong, Confucian, Buddhist and Taoism traditions of the country. Practitioners are peaceful and non-political, but their values, including "truth, compassion and forbearance", clearly conflict with those of Jiang's political party and its ideological origins in the Europeans Marx and Lenin. As one Chinese farmer put it, "Karl Marx does not sound like a Chinese name." Similarly, Jiang's party made it illegal to teach authentic Confucianism anywhere in China, but the government is now setting up Confucian institutes in numerous centres around the world.

'Carnivore Capitalism'

A second key factor leading to organ snatching was the 'dog-eat-dog' market economic model introduced by Deng Xiaoping after he became paramount leader in the late 1970s. The unofficial national goal soon became "get rich by any means". When many hospital budgets across China were cut by Beijing, the temptation for them, the military and medical professionals to profit from the sale of organs of Falun Gong "enemies" to foreigners and wealthy Chinese nationals soon evolved out of the persecution underway since mid-1999.

Consider the statement of the ex-wife of a Chinese surgeon, which is appendix 18 in our revised report. She was told by him that he was paid the equivalent of hundreds of thousands of US dollars for removing corneas from about 2000 Falun Gong practitioners between 2001 and October of 2003. In the years since the persecution began, Matas and I have found approximately 41,500 transplantations across China which are unaccounted for by the executions of convicted criminals, voluntary donors and brain dead accident victims.

Falun Gong No Cult

I might add here that the Government of China's Big Untruth, i.e., that Falun Gong is an "evil cult", reminds one of the messages the government of Rwanda broadcast through its party media about the Tutsi community before the terrible events between April and June of 1994. There has been such a stream of propaganda against Falun Gong in the entirely government-controlled media across China since mid-1999 that many Chinese nationals and even some outside China unfortunately appear to have accepted the Party line.

Permit me to say that I spoke about the dangers of cults at a conference at the University of Alberta a few years ago, the text of which is available on my website (david-kilgour.com). A better source on the subject is Professor David Ownby of the University of Montreal, who is cited in our report and did specific research on Falun Gong. He concluded that Falun Gong is by no means a cult, adding:

- Falun Gong practitioners in North America are well-educated and tend to live in nuclear families. Many work with computers or in finance; some are engineers.

- Falun Gong Practitioners do not have financial obligations to their faith community; as well, they do not live in isolation and are law-abiding.

Ownby's conclusion accords with that of many independent observers, including David Matas and myself. In the 70 or so countries where it exists, there is only one, China, where its practitioners appear not to be considered good citizens and exemplary members of their respective civil societies.

European Experience with Totalitarianism

The topic this afternoon should ring loud bells for many Europeans at this conference, especially Germans living in the former German Democratic Republic, who survived both Adolph Hitler and the GDR "democrats". No German needs to be told that Hitler in fact despised all religions, although at times he pretended otherwise about some of them. In hindsight, except for a rather small of leaders such as Dietrich Bonnhoffer (sp?), the naivete of Christian denominations during the earlier years of the Third Reich was breathtaking. After 1945, their determination never again to be co-opted by governments of any stripe forged a realism that contributed much to the toppling of a number of dictatorships across Europe after 1989.

Professor Robert Manne in Australia has written well about this period in his recent book, *Left, Right Left-Political Essays 1977-2005*. Manne, whose family fled Hitler's Europe for Australia, makes some points which seem relevant to the subject matter. Noting that 1917-91 is now a completed chapter of Marxism-Leninism in Europe but not in parts of Asia, Manne continues:

"...communism was for the European countries over which it established its hold and almost unmitigated calamity. In the Soviet Union since 1917 and in the Eastern Europe since 1944 communism caused the death of tens of millions of innocents; perpetuated one or other form of economic misery or hardship over the generations; alienated peasants and farmers from the soil; turned the most straightforward aspects of daily life-like shopping or medical care-into drudgery, adventure or worse; made talk of democracy a form of cant disguising vicious personal dictatorships or immobilist gerontocracies; perverted a radical version of the ideal of equality into a cover for the class rule of a privileged strata of party bureaucrats, the nomenklatura ; stifled national self-determination for scores of ethnicities from Central Asia to Central Europe; destroyed all concept of the rule of law; injected fear and then cynicism into the soils of generations of Soviet and East European subjects; turned art into propaganda; and confronted artists with the choice between self-exile or hackery. Apart from its capacity to extract high proportions of gross domestic product for the armed forces, to win Olympic medals and to maintain large masses of people in attitudes of submission over long periods of time, it is difficult to credit communism with any cultural achievement."

George Orwell

Manne's book of essays is also eloquent on the subject of George Orwell, who was probably the greatest writer in English on totalitarianism. It quotes from *Animal Farm* the most famous line Orwell ever penned, which captures so well the betrayal of the people by the Russian Revolution: "All animals are equal but some are more equal than others."

Orwell, of course, cared deeply about both genuine human equality and freedom. He wrote scathingly about “party hacks” and what he termed “sleek professors”, who were willing to trade freedom for one or another cause. In 1946, he wrote:

“For some years passed, orthodoxy – at least the dominant brand of it – has consisted in not criticizing Stalin, and the resulting corruption has been such that the bulk of the English intelligentsia has looked on at torture, massacre and aggression without expressing disapproval .. In five years, it may be as dangerous to praise Stalin as it was to attack him two years ago. But I shall not regard that as an advance. Nothing is gained by teaching a parrot a new word.”

China Rights Forum

In the current issue of an important publication, China Rights Forum, published by the NGO Human Rights in China (www.hriChina.org), there is a list of the known persons in China by category, who will still be in prison during the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. Among those imprisoned for religious reasons, consider the breakdown:

- Falun gong-68
- Protestants-39
- Catholics-26

The list, which helps illustrate the government’s real attitude towards religions, no doubt, understates the number of persons in all categories, especially the Falun Gong. They are mostly in forced labour camps (which are not prisons for this list), working up to 16 hours daily to make a range of products for export, including Christmas decorations, chopsticks, gloves and garments in complete violation of World Trade Organization rules. David Matas and I learned a good deal about this side of China’s exports as we traveled to about 30 national capitals over the past six or so months, speaking to as many possible of the Falun Gong victims who managed to get out of both the camps and China.

Secretly executed Religious Leaders

Google “Chinese government secretly executed”. Some of these should relate to three Christians killed secretly in prison in western China in late November 2006: Xu Shuangfu, Li Maoxing and Wang Jun. Xu led a church with evidently more than 500,000 adherents across China. Their lawyers said they were convicted by confessions obtained by torture.

If anyone thinks that persecution of religions has diminished in recent centuries, permit me to point out that the last century was undoubtedly the worst in recorded history for brutality directed at believers. One estimate of the number of human beings of all nationalities who died prematurely for their faiths between 1900 and 2000 is a staggering 169 million, including: 70 million Muslims, 35 million Christians, 11 million Hindus, nine million Jews, four million Buddhists, two million Sikhs and one million Baha’is.

Too many of these victims died in inter or intra-faith violence, but most by far perished at the hands of totalitarian regimes, which detest all religions mostly because believers’ deepest loyalties lie elsewhere. Stalin, Hitler, Mao and other dictators had murdered untold tens of millions of their own citizens.

Religious Liberty Indivisible

One researcher on the persecution of religions in China suggested several years ago that there were probably as many Christians attending services there each week—mostly in secret—as were doing so openly across Europe. The constitution of China says its citizens ‘enjoy freedom of religious belief’ (art. 36), although those outside the so-called “patriotic churches” are not permitted to practise their faith.

China’s government in fact considers all spiritual communities to be misguided, deviations and mistakes in accord with the dialectic materialism of Karl Marx. Enter, for example, “Chinese government persecution of Christians” on Google.com and read some of the truly appalling entries. Replace “Christians” here with any of a host of other targeted religions in China, such as Muslims, Buddhists, Falun Gong etc and you will be equally dismayed.

Conclusion

Human dignity today is indivisible around our shrunken planet. All faith communities and other members of civil societies everywhere should be fully united on issues like the ones religious communities have faced daily for too long across China. If all of us in open societies around the world don’t unite on such matters, some of the world’s remaining 40 or so dictatorships will only repeat the terrible ravages of the last century.

Here are three specific ways we can demonstrate our concerns about basic religious and other freedoms in China:

1. Let’s all of us resolve to use fully the window provided by the August 2008 Olympic Games in China to push hard on members of our respective national Olympic committees, sports federations, potential event sponsors and possible spectators in Beijing to demand that the killing of Falun Gong prisoners of conscience for their organs and other abuses of religious practitioners cease in China now.
2. Bilateral relations between China and any self-respecting government should be based on fundamental human values as well as commercial considerations. A democratic China with the rule of law and human rights should be the goal of all peoples around the world. International peace and security would be much enhanced if China would join the democracies.
3. Unfortunately because human rights across China are now worsening rather than improving as its government pledged when it bid for the Olympic Games, some are already calling it the “Olympic Shame”. We should all do our utmost to raise religious liberty issues with Chinese visitors to our respective countries, including the thousands of students studying in the West, in the months leading up to August, 2008.

Thank you.