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President Bush in China — Brave Support for Religious Liberty

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Before the week ends, I want to draw attention to what many (but not all) in the mainstream media have missed — President George W. Bush's brave and strategic support for religious liberty during his recent visit to Asia.

The President's first public appearance in Beijing was at Gangwasi Church (Protestant), where he also attended services last Sunday. This event came even before the official welcoming ceremony at the Great Hall of the People.

From the President's comments after the service: *My hope is that the government of China will not fear Christians who gather to worship openly. A healthy society is a society that welcomes all faiths and gives people a chance to express themselves through worship with the Almighty.*

China recently arrested a pastor for printing and distributing Bibles, and the Chinese are still deprived of genuine religious liberty. The China Aid Association reported that the Chinese government arrested eight house-church pastors just prior to the President's visit.

President Bush's strong words and his attendance at the church service sent a strong and unequivocal message of support for religious liberty and freedom of worship. He was not afraid to offend his hosts, if necessary, in order to defend and demand religious liberty for the Chinese people.

In its International Religious Freedom Report for 2004, the U.S. State Department listed five “Countries of Particular Concern” with respect to religious liberty — China, Burma, Iran, North Korea, and Sudan.

In announcing the release of the report, Ambassador John Hanford stated: *In China, the government continues to repress Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims, Catholics faithful to the Vatican, underground Protestants and Falun Gong. Many religious believers are in prison for their faith and others continue to face detention, beatings, torture and the destruction of places of worship. Many observers believe that in recent months China has engaged in a crackdown against some independent religious groups.*

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