Difficulties for believers have increased as the new 2018 Regulations on Religious Affairs limit many religious activities to registered sites and introduce further restrictions.¹ On March 21, 2018 oversight of religious affairs was transferred from the State Administration of Religious Affairs to the United Front Work Department, an agency of the Chinese Communist Party.² There are fears that China’s new “social credit system” – designed to reward good citizenship and punish bad – will be used to discriminate against Christians.³ Education is used as a tool of social conditioning: in some regions pupils were reportedly required to sign a statement saying they will “promote atheism, and oppose belief in God.”⁴ In other areas problems continue. Christian clergy are still subject to arbitrary arrest⁵ and building regulations are increasingly used as a pretext for church demolitions. Despite the September 2018 agreement between the Vatican and China, the Catholic Church’s status continues to be complex: two underground bishops were formally replaced by bishops from the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association; and even after the agreement, state agents destroyed Marian shrines in Shanxi and Guizhou.⁶

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