

The South China Morning Post has reported that thousands of Christians in an impoverished county in rural southeast China have swapped their posters of Jesus for portraits of Xi Jinping as part of a local government poverty-relief programme that seeks to “transform believers in religion into believers in the party”.

The atheist Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is worried that people who have religious beliefs will not allow their morals to be corrupted by the CCP, and under Xi has tightened its grip on religious freedom throughout the country.

Qi Yan, chairman of the Huangjinbu people’s congress, said: “Many poor households have plunged into poverty because of illness in the family. Some resorted to believing in Jesus to cure their illnesses, but we tried to tell them that getting ill is a physical thing and that the people who can really help them are the Communist Party and General Secretary Xi.”

Qi also said: “Many rural people are ignorant. They think God is their saviour ... After our cadres’ work, they’ll realise their mistakes and think: we should no longer rely on Jesus, but on the party for help.”

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