

PROTESTANT CHURCH UPDATE

FEBRUARY 2014

3 Updates

1. Outburst of Persecution Strikes Christians Across China
2. Protestantism growing rapidly in China
3. Why China Celebrates Christmas

1.

Outburst of Persecution Strikes Christians Across China

28th January 2014

Outburst of Persecution Strikes Christians Across China

By Carol Wickenkamp, Epoch Times

Late in November of 2013, following a high Chinese Communist Party official's address asserting the CCP's tolerance for religions, the regime clamped down even harder on Tibetans, Uyghurs, and practitioners of Falun Gong. Now Christian churches—even state-registered ones—are being tormented across China.

State Bureau of Religious Affairs director Wang Zuoran's speech, printed in People's Daily, acknowledged the value of religious people to Chinese society and asked for their support in achieving the Chinese Dream, the current leadership's goal of a revitalized China. While Wang's remarks suggested even something more than toleration for religion, the reality has proven different.

A popular Tibetan religious teacher was beaten to death while in custody in Lhasa and others monks detained less than three weeks after Wang's address. Concurrently, 14 Uyghurs were killed in an incident in Xinjiang, triggered by a policeman lifting a woman's veil.

As of Jan. 21, Minghui (a site run by Falun Gong that serves as a clearinghouse for reports on the persecution of the spiritual practice) has received reports of 228 January arrests, 33 "trials" resulting in 16 illegal prison sentences, 16 detentions at brainwashing centers, and three death cases reported in January so far.

In mid-November, Zhang Shaojie, the popular pastor of a state-sanctioned Christian church in Hunan Province was detained by officials along with church members, but no charges were announced.

In December a group of Chinese rights lawyers and a British news crew attempting to meet with Zhang were assaulted by a crowd of unidentified people, said to be hired by

local officials.

The pastor, who defended his church's land rights, will be put on trial on Jan. 28 for "gathering a crowd to disturb public order" and "fraud" charges, his lawyer told China Aid. Parishioners say that the local officials want the church's land for development.

Christmas and the New Year

In Sichuan Province, an employee of an unregistered house church was detained on Dec. 24 for organizing a Christmas gathering for church members, though he had informed the Domestic Security Protection Squad prior to the celebration. His request for reconsideration of the detention has been denied several times, said China Aid.

China Aid has received reports of persecution from local churches across China. Local police raided a house church in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region on Jan. 1, while believers were celebrating the New Year, detaining nine members. Authorities are evicting a small house church in Xincheng, Shandong Province. A Christmas celebration in Anhui Province was disrupted by police and some members were put under administrative detention, a church member reported.

In Beijing a house church member was taken from his home and placed under house arrest in a different location. When friends attempted to take food and medicine to him on Friday, fifteen of them were detained.

A house church in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province reported to China Aid that police have disrupted their church gathering twice a week since the beginning of January, while Christians in central Henan Province say they are afraid to attend their church meetings because several local government departments have been harassing them.

"The director of the Religion Affairs Bureau is "running" the Church ever more ostentatiously, not even taking care to save the appearances. The only purpose of their work seems to be 'enslaving' our Church (unfortunately with much success) by forcing our bishops and priests to betray their conscience, their faith," said Cardinal Joseph Zen, bishop emeritus of Hong Kong, voicing his concern at the situation of the Catholic faithful in China to AsiaNews, a Vatican publication.

2.

Protestantism growing rapidly in China

26th December 2013

Protestantism growing rapidly in China

By CCTV reporter Wu Guoxiu

At a time when many people are celebrating Christmas, it's a time to look at how the religion is received by Chinese people. Our reporter Wu Guoxiu has been to a service at a Protestant church in Beijing, to see who is following the religion and why they chose it.

A happy rhythm kicks off a Sunday prayer in Beijing Haidian Christian Church. Not a single seat is empty. Some of them are students seeking God before seeking a job.

"It's always necessary to find God. Whatever my future studies or work, or when I build a family, God will be the one I can rely on."

While most Chinese parents tend to take their children to special classes, these parents bring their toddlers to church. This couple have come with their daughter, and a second child is on the way.

" I want to bring up my children to revere God when they are young. It's more important than making them learn pianos or English. It'll accompany them through a whole life."

Reporter: " In this church alone, 8,000 people come to pray on Sundays. The religion is growing rapidly in China. An official figure says 2.4 million Chinese were baptised in Protestant churches in China in the five years between 2007 and 2012."

Senior Pastor Wu Weiqing has welcomed many people into the church. He says they include university professors, students, company employees, factory workers and farmers.

" In China's today society, people want to establish friendly relationship with each other, in which love is playing a very significant role. Church today can offer the love through Jesus Christ, I think that's one of the significant reasons of why they come to church." Wu Weiqing, senior pastor of Beijing Haidian Christian Church, said.

Estimates vary for the number of Protestants in China, but Wu Weiqing believes there are about 25 to 27 million.

And he believes the religion will continue to develop in China.

<http://english.cntv.cn/program/china24/20131226/100664.shtml>

3.

Why China Celebrates Christmas

21st December 2013

China Source - China Church Voices

ChinaSource Blog

Thoughts about working and serving in China from our staff and others with experience and insight to share. Opinions expressed are not necessarily endorsed by ChinaSource.

Why China Celebrates Christmas

By Brent Fulton

So here I am, eggnog latte in hand, seated in one of the ubiquitous branches of an internationally branded coffee chain. The city is not important. This could be Hong Kong or Beijing, New York or London. The festive holiday decor would be the same anywhere, along with the exhortations to "Create Wonder" and "Share Joy" stenciled on the front window.

Christmas is a global holiday, and it looks pretty much the same wherever goes is in the world. Including China. Once banned as a sign of bourgeois decadence, Christmas has made a roaring comeback in the Middle Kingdom.

A recent article in the official English daily Global Times looked at why China celebrates Christmas. Not surprisingly, the writer highlighted the vast amount of economic activity generated by the holiday. Christmas in China, like anywhere else, is good for business. It puts people in a mood to spend money, gives them plenty of things to spend it on, and rewards the spending with the good feelings that come with giving and receiving gifts.

But that's not all. Here's the remarkable part of the story: The writer also interviewed some merrymakers on the street who were not just lugging home bags of newly purchased merchandise or out partying with friends. These were Christians, handing out invitations to a different kind of Christmas party, a "Christmas Good News Party" held at their church. In the words of the writer, "While for many Chinese Christmas is a time for shopping and revelry, not everyone has decided to immerse themselves in the carnival of consumerism, but are instead seeking to restore its original meaning."

According to the Gospel Times article, "With the rapid development of Christianity in

China over the past 20 years, especially with the new phenomenon of worship services held in houses, office buildings and commercial spaces emerging in major cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and economically developed eastern coastal cities, more and more Chinese people are, for the first time, walking into churches for Christmas."

Long lines form outside China's officially registered churches, where Christmas celebrations attract thousands who would not likely otherwise attend church. Meanwhile, the unregistered gatherings that have proliferated in Chinese cities open their doors to curious participants or, in some cases, even rent hotel ballrooms in order to accommodate the crowds.

The Global Times article continues, "inviting non-Christians to churches during traditional Christian festivals has become a growing phenomenon in many emerging house churches in Chinese cities in recent years. The church will usually begin preparing the event months in advance and actively invite non-Christians to spend time together and understand the true meaning of Christmas."

China's Christians may, like believers in other countries, bemoan the commercialism that has come to characterize Christmas as a global holiday. Yet the legitimization of Christmas in China has created a natural platform to share the hope they have not only at Christmas but throughout the year.

For more on Christmas in China, see the video "What is Christmas and Who is Jesus" on the ChinaSource site Chinese Church Voices.
<http://chinesechurchvoices.com/2012/12/24/video-what-is-christmas-and-who-is-jesus-update/>

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