

Why China Fears Christians

Commentary for February 1, 2021 — Christians Are a Deadly Threat to the CCP

China must persecute Christians within its borders if it hopes to survive as a Communist regime. Pray that God protects the *ekklesias* and people of China from such persecution. This Commentary is an introduction to this month's expanded article, "[China in Prophecy](#)." I added background on the history of Christianity in China.

What Is Important Within China?

The five points below apply to the existence of China and the CCP (Chinese Communist Party).¹ Almost all China's top leaders are members of the CCP. To China's leaders, the CCP is primary, the country is secondary.

- (1) The **First Priority** of *EVERY* large organization — whether a government, a corporation, or a religious denomination — is the continued survival of the organization.
- (2) The **Second Priority** of *EVERY* large organization is to maintain the flow of income, money being the life-blood of human organizations.
- (3) The **Third Priority** of *EVERY* large organization is to serve citizens, customers, or members (employees and volunteers) as defined by that organization.
- (4) The **Fourth Priority** of *EVERY* large organization is to be faithful to the ideals of the organization.
- (5) The **Fifth Priority** of *EVERY* large organization — is to tell the truth to people.²

China is a secular country though its constitution allows religious freedom. Christians are a threat to Communist rule because they claim allegiance to God and not to the government of China or the CCP. Keeping 1.4 billion people in subjection is difficult because each of those "children of Adam" have been given self-will (only God has free will). Like all organizations, the CCP and Chinese government concentrate on the priorities of survival and income.

Believing Christians in China are loyal first to God, and less loyal to the government or the CCP. Therefore, they are viewed as a direct threat as the government tries to make itself a secular "god" to its people — an impossible goal. Though Paul commands them to pray for their leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-3), Christians care little about their government or its survival.

¹ Alternately called the "Communist Party of China" (CPC) a brief history of the party can be found at "[Membership in the Communist Party of China: Who is Being Admitted and How?](#)" Figures as of October 2020 are at "[Chinese Communist Party — statistics & facts](#)." Christian population in China is approximately 100 million, with perhaps 10–12 million Catholics added to that figure.

² From my article, "[What Is Important](#)." Truth has the lowest priority for organizations, especially if survival is at stake.

All human organizations have a life cycle: birth, youth, adulthood, old age, and death. The CCP began in 1921. Communists conquered China and formed a government power in 1949. The economy stagnated until rapid economic growth began 40 years ago (funded by the United States and other Western powers). The government may fall and the nation break up like communist Soviet Union in late 1991 if growth reverses, stalls or stops ("[The Undoing of China's Economic Miracle](#)," January 11, 2021).

"From the COVID-19 outbreak to the subsequent economic crisis, with catastrophic flooding of the Yangtze River thrown in for good measure, 2020 has subjected the Communist Party of China to one existential crisis after another.

... The most important question then is not whether Xi [Chinese President Xi Jinping] is strong or China is on the brink of collapse. He and China are simultaneously, perpetually both.

... Once Beijing was able to reopen most of the economy, it faced a secondary crisis in the form of collapsing demand for Chinese exports as the rest of the world sunk into crisis."

• "[China's Trial by Fire](#)" **Geopolitical Futures, September 18, 2020**

Those Chinese approaching or entering the middle class will not happily return to the subsistence living of decades before. Beijing does not fear religion itself, but it fears any civil society institutions capable of organizing and mobilizing against the government or CCP.

China Fears the Growth of Christianity

If an economic downturn occurs, which is inevitable at some time, a fast-growing belief system like Christianity, is a direct threat to the survival of the government and the CCP. The growing numbers of Christian believers, combined with organizational skills, and faithfulness to a higher power than China's secular rulers, make Christians a direct threat to Priorities 1 and 2 for China. Christian growth is increasing while China suffers a lower birth rate.

Covid-19 lockdowns in China nearly destroyed underground house churches in China. See the *Express* January 24, 2021 news article, "[Xi Terrified by Christianity Surge in China – Dictator Fears '300 Million-Strong' Uprising](#)." In 2018 online retailers were stopped from selling Bibles to anyone. With the outbreak of Covid-19, cell phone tracking was mandated by the Chinese government. This increased surveillance prevented members of house churches to meet. Some areas of China demanded believers recant their Christian faith. In other areas church buildings were demolished.³

None of this should surprise us. After describing his own sufferings, the apostle Paul wrote, **"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution"** (2 Timothy 3:12).

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Below is a January 26, 2021 article from *Christian Today*
(not to be confused with *Christianity Today*).

³ "[Growing Christian Movement Threatens Authoritarian China](#)," "[Thousands of Pastors Go Into Hiding Amid China's Rising Persecution, Attempts to Eradicate Christianity](#)."

[“Why Does China Feel So Threatened by Christians?”](#)

from *Christian Today*

This January, [the organization] Open Doors released its [“2021 World Watch List”](#) of the 50 countries where Christians suffer the worst persecution. This year, China ranked 17th — the first time in a decade that the communist country has re-entered the top 20.

The coronavirus pandemic made life hard enough for people, but for Christians there were additional pressures as the state increasingly used it as a pretext to increase surveillance and tighten its grip on churches.

Dr. Ron Boyd-MacMillan, Director of Strategic Research at Open Doors International, speaks to Christian Today about the impact that Covid-19 has had on religious freedom in China and whether things are about to get better or worse.

CT: How has coronavirus impacted on religious freedom in China? Has it made things worse for Christians there?

Ron: It stopped all churches meeting for quite a while, and leaders said that hurt, because the church is physical. But the main impact was the intelligence gift Christians had to give to the government to combat Covid on their smartphones. People were torn. They wanted the government to protect them from the ravages of Covid. As one Christian in Wuhan said, “What’s the point of freedom if you are too scared to leave your home?” On the other hand, giving so much information to the government about movements and habits essentially meant that, to all intents and purposes, the government knows always where you are and what you are doing. As a Christian leader said, “2020 may be the year the possibility of even being an underground church died.”

CT: There are reports across China of the authorities increasingly interfering with churches. Why do you think this interference has escalated?

Ron: This has been happening for a while, essentially since 2013, when Xi Jinping became President. He has instituted a new era of control and compliance, introducing an older ideological component in insisting that everyone express loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In 2018, new regulations governing religious activities were introduced, and there has been invasive surveillance and control since.

CT: Even registered churches are being affected. Why do you think the CCP is clamping down on them too?

Ron: The control of religion covers all elements and groups. On the Protestant side, the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) has had to cope with a host of regulations. The TSPM only really has people who are servile to government at the top, but at the congregational level it is very evangelical. So, every church has been required to install CCTV cameras, turn away under 18s at the door, and require pastors to praise the CCP and Xi for their excellent helming of Chinese society.

CT: Why do you think the CCP feels so threatened by Christians and churches?

Ron: In a nutshell, it's because of their growth. In the 2021 World Watch List, Open Doors estimates the numbers of Chinese Christians at 97 million, though the number is often estimated as being even higher by some very well placed sources. Baldly, if the Chinese church grows at the same annual rate since 1980, which is seven per cent, then Christians will number nearly 300 million by 2030, and nearly 600 million by 2040. We know that the Chinese leadership specialises in long-term planning, and if this growth continues the CCP will have to share power with the Christian church – a prospect which appalls them.

CT: Some critics of China feel that the country is buying the silence of democratic countries through trade. Do you think this is the case?

Ron: I would not be surprised. It is no secret that when China makes loans to African nations, there is no requirement to respect human rights, in contrast to loans from, for example, the European Union. But my contacts are not so exalted as to know for sure how this pressure may work in practice.

CT: What should the UK and other Western countries be doing in their relations with China to improve religious liberty there?

Ron: They should raise the issue of religious liberty, not bury it. Also, it is important to stress to Chinese officials that Christians build society. For example, there are 278 million people over 60 in China. The Chinese government will need allies to deal with the coming crisis in social care. The church can help, and Western countries can be useful in sharing that Christians spread compassion, care, commitment – all critical components in building safer, better, fairer societies.

CT: Beijing last year introduced a national security law to Hong Kong and there are fears for freedoms there – Cardinal Zen, for example, recently said that it is becoming like any other city in China. Do you think this law will impact Christians and their religious freedom?

Ron: It may in time. Cardinal Zen has been a fearless and shrewd observer and participant on the HK scene for many years. But the actual law is not targeted at the church. These changes are not within the purview of the 2021 World Watch List. And it does bear saying that HK churches still experience far greater freedoms than churches in the rest of China.

CT: Do you think the clampdown across China has “plateaued” or do you think there could be a further escalation this year? It seems like there is little hope of improvement any time soon?

Ron: It is very tight at the moment anyway, with little prospect of any loosening soon. A worsening could be counting Christian activity as a negative and lowering a citizen's social credit rating, but this system has yet to be fully worked out. On the other hand, Chinese Christians still hope that their leaders will learn to see Christians as a help rather than a threat to their attempts to make China a better society.

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