

# **PROTESTANT CHURCH IN CHINA-**

## **5 UPDATES AUGUST 2011**

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**Standard-Examiner**

**LDS Church, China reach agreement**

**Last updated: Monday, August 30, 2010 - 10:35pm**

SALT LAKE CITY -- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints announced Monday that its members in China will be able to live their religion openly and comfortably while keeping their lives in accordance with Chinese law.

Officials used the term "regularized" to explain new procedures and agreements that will be put in place, but did not provide further details.

A local church official had a positive reaction to the news.

"China is a growing and developing nation, and for the church to have a relationship with China so the church can grow and flower there is wonderful," said Elder Donald Keyes, of Uintah, an Area Seventy for the church.

A statement from the First Presidency of the Church disclosed Monday that the highest-ranking representative from Beijing to meet with church leaders had visited with the First Presidency.

That meeting was in Salt Lake City on Aug. 24 and followed meetings in February and May in Beijing, attended by church Elders Dallin H. Oaks and Donald L. Hallstrom.

Oaks, a member of the Twelve Apostles, and Hallstrom, a member of the Presidency of the Seventy, are responsible for overseeing the church in Asia. These meetings were initiated by the Chinese representative, the church said.

"It is important to understand what the term regularizing means, and what it does not mean," church spokesman Michael Otterson said.

"It does not mean that we anticipate sending missionaries to China. That issue is not even under consideration.

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"The church deeply appreciates the courtesy of the Chinese leadership in opening up a way to better define how the church and its members can proceed with daily activities, all in harmony with Chinese law."

Otterson said that many details need to be worked out in further discussions. He said the pending developments were the result of 30 years of building mutual trust with the Chinese.

Otterson said that given the importance of understanding and complying with various Chinese laws and the need for ongoing cooperative efforts, the church does not plan to comment further on the discussions at this time.

"At the conclusion of the meeting in Salt Lake City, it was agreed that it would be appropriate for this information to be announced publicly," Otterson said.

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## **The Guardian, UK**

### **China: the future of Christianity?**

**With the state now actively financing Christianity, China could well become the largest Christian country in the world**

**Antonio Weiss**

**guardian.co.uk, Saturday 28 August 2010 12.00 BST**

Ever since Deng Xiaoping's relaxation of the Chinese Communist party's (CCP) suppression of religious practice in the late 1970s, Christianity has flourished in China. This has been an unexpected phenomenon, as it has been a story largely unheralded by the western media. While figures are patchy, it is estimated that the Christian missionaries (of whom the first were the Nestorians as far back as the Tang dynasty in the seventh century) that were expelled from the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 left behind about half a million people baptised – the majority of whom were Catholics. Today, estimates of Christians range between 40 million and 100 million.

Mao Zedong's cultural revolution banned all forms of religious expression, driving Christians underground into "house churches". After the cultural revolution, realising the potential dangers of such uncontrolled practices, the CCP reinstated the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and formed the China Christian Council as the formal registered organisations of Chinese Protestants, as well as the Catholic equivalent – the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association. The latter, critically, has no formal links with the Vatican, in large part due to CCP fears of western meddling.

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During this period, house churches boomed in popularity. As the New York Times correspondent Nicholas Kristof noted, initially popular among the peasantry, Christianity's reach has extended towards the cities and the wealthy and intellectual Chinese over the last decade.

The reasons for this boom are twofold. The first is that the Chinese have found Christianity to be a stabilising belief system amid a dramatically changing socioeconomic landscape, which had its previous religious traditions crushed by Maoism and its values questioned after Tiananmen Square. And, secondly, with its obvious western heritage, the rise of Christianity may be linked to a subconscious attack on the norms and values espoused by the PRC – rather like South Korea in the 1980s.

However what is most surprising is the CCP's recent policy of actively funding and supporting state-sponsored Christian belief in China, as reported by the BBC earlier this week. According to the director general for the state administration for religious affairs, Wang Zuo An, this is due to the CCP's belief "that it should respect and protect religious belief".

This state-sponsored investment includes building Protestant and Catholic seminaries, funding academic studies into the role of religion in China, and donating land and part-financing the construction of the largest state-sanctioned church in China (for an expected 5,000 worshippers). According to Wang, there are now around 23m official Protestants in China (members of the TSPM), and that "Christianity is enjoying its best period of growth in China".

Yet this all sits rather uneasily with a state that does not allow Christians to be members of the Communist party and whose police, the Public Security Bureau, still frequently break up house church meetings (though with considerable inconsistency from province to province). According to the US group, China Aid Association, from 2005 to 2006, 1,958 Chinese Christians were arrested by the state.

The likelihood is that this policy of "accommodation" is a result of the CCP's past experiences with underground religious organisations and its acknowledgement of the potential economic prosperity that Christianity can bring. In the first instance, it would appear that conscious of the disastrously counterproductive suppression of the "spiritual movement" Falun Gong in the 1990s, the CCP believes that the threat caused by unregistered house churches is best neutralised by bringing Christianity under the auspices of the state.

While the majority of house churches do not appear to have a political agenda (though a small number of revolutionary cults have appeared in rural areas), any violent suppression of Christian groups risks provoking the ire of the west, in particular the US. Second, the recommendations of the prominent Chinese economist, Zhao Xiao, that market economies benefit from active religious groups seem to have been adopted by the CCP leadership. Perhaps eyeing the benefits that a strong, state-approved Christian voluntary sector could bring

to China, in late 2007 President Hu Jintao announced "the knowledge of religious people must be harnessed to build a prosperous society".

On its current trajectory and with state backing, as the former Time magazine Beijing chief David Aikman notes, within three decades there may be nearly 400 million Christians in China. The future of Christianity may well lie in the east.

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## **BBC News Asia-Pacific**

**23 August 2010 Last updated at 23:52 GMT**

### **China invests in confident Christians**

**By Christopher Landau BBC News, China**

Three decades ago, China's Cultural Revolution saw some of the most dramatic restrictions on the practice of religion ever seen in the modern world.

But today's communist rulers have radically altered their views about religion and have granted substantial freedom to Christians prepared to worship within state-sanctioned churches.

Within these boundaries, Christianity is growing in China as never before - and doing so supported by millions of dollars of government funding.

The BBC has been given unprecedented access to China's state-sanctioned Protestant and Catholic churches, to examine why the government seems so keen to invest in religion.

\*\*\* State funding

On the outskirts of Nanjing, a building site illustrates the scale of the communist state's commitment to supporting the development of Christianity.

Local officials say that the building under construction will become China's largest state-sanctioned church - with space for 5,000 worshippers.

The land - and 20% of the building costs - are being provided not by local Christians, but by the municipal government.

It represents state financial support worth millions of dollars - just one example of the strategy to encourage the development of religion in China.

Director General, State Administration for Religious Affairs, Wang Zuo An Mr Wang says Christianity is growing faster than ever

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The Communist Party's senior official with responsibility for this policy is the director general of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, Wang Zuo An.

In a rare interview, he told me that there are now at least 20m Protestant Christians in China worshipping in the state-sanctioned church.

"Such growth is unprecedented in the history of Christianity in China. Christianity is enjoying its best period of growth in China," he said.

And he explained why the Chinese state is investing in religious faith - support which has included funding the construction of national Protestant and Catholic seminaries educating hundreds of future Christian leaders each year.

"Our goal in supporting these religions in developing religious education is that we hope they can train qualified clergy members so that their religions can enjoy better development."

But there is no small irony in the party's new-found enthusiasm for supporting the development of religion in China, given Communism's commitment to atheism.

"On the question of whether there is God, the Chinese Communist Party believes there is no God in the world," said Mr Wang.

"The Communist Party believes that it should respect and protect religious belief. The members of the party must respect religious followers and not infringe their interests."

He insists that there is no contradiction between the Communist Party insisting that its own members are non-religious, and the communist government's commitment to investing in religious development.

"We are making laws and regulations to better guarantee religious belief in China," he says.

\*\*\* Social role

At the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a professor who specialises in the study of Christianity believes that there are various factors contributing to its growth.

Professor Xhuo Xinping says that there is a spiritual appeal, and a potential association with economic prosperity.

But he says Christianity will finally shake off imperialist associations if churches are prepared to act as a servant to Chinese society.

Fr Zhang and resident at old people's home, China Father John Zhang interprets the church mission as social work and service

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"Many Christians pay special attention to social work and social service. I think this is the correct way for Christianity to develop," he said.

One Catholic priest who has pioneered such work in China is the Rev John Zhang - whose Jinde charities receive support from Catholics around the world.

I visited the old people's home he runs in Shijiazhuang City, where he told me why he thinks the government welcomes the church's contribution.

"Homes for the aged are urgent. We need more and more. The government realised that."

"Some officials say, you have done for Chinese society what we cannot do. Without any political involvement, the church is doing a good job, and we from government appreciate it," said Father Zhang.

The enthusiasm of the communist authorities for his church-run initiative is such that even the Communist Youth League used the old people's home as a base for a charitable project.

\*\*\* Confident Christians

But there is still a question about whether as China's Christians grow in confidence they will be prepared to continue to accept the limitations on their freedom.

At Beijing's Haidian Church, the Senior Pastor Wu Weiqing is candid about the problems he faces, but also enthusiastic about the level of religious liberty he enjoys.

Worshippers at Haidian church, Beijing More and more Chinese are beginning to practise the Christian faith

"We do have problems, struggling with some kind of regulations, I have to be true to you. But because we are registered, because we obey the regulations and laws, we enjoy more freedom.

"I'm very happy, I enjoy my service as a pastor. I sometimes encourage people who work for the so-called house churches to come to this kind of church to worship," said Pastor Wu.

Those house churches - the unregistered, or underground churches, which were the only place to worship during the repression of the Cultural Revolution - remain a significant part of the Chinese Christian landscape.

But both the Catholic and Protestant churches sanctioned by the state are now also seeing levels of growth that few predicted in the 1980s.

Two students I met at an evening service of prayer and praise at Haidian church summed up the optimism felt by growing numbers of young Chinese Christians.

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"We truly hope [that in] our country there will be more Christians, and God's word will spread everywhere in our country", said Daniel.

His fellow student Jesse added, "I think this nation will change, and I think God is doing great things in China."

There is no doubting the confidence of these Christians.

But there is also no guarantee about the sort of future the communist government will allow the churches it is currently keen to support.

\* To hear more about state-sanctioned Christianity in China, tune in to this week's Heart and Soul on the BBC World Service at 1230 GMT on Wednesday 25 August.

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**UCA News - [www.ucanews.com](http://www.ucanews.com)**

## **Faiths in turmoil in China, says report**

**Published Date: August 13, 2010**

**By [ucanews.com](http://ucanews.com) reporter, Beijing**

A comprehensive report on religion in China says all five government-recognized religions – Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism – face unprecedented challenge and change.

The Annual Report on China's Religions (2010) published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a Beijing think-tank, attributes the upheaval to the dramatic social transformation taking place throughout China.

Among its comments on individual faiths, it says that:

- \* Buddhism is impacted by the commercialism of the new economy.
- \* The sacredness of Taoism is being eroded by the secular.
- \* Muslims in China feel perplexed by the difference between history and modern reality.
- \* The Catholic Church in China has to uphold the principle of independence at the same time as it has to handle its relationship with the Vatican.

As well as touching briefly on Confucianism and folk religions, the book, launched in Beijing on Aug. 11, contains the first-ever large scale survey of China's Protestant Church. The survey was based on data from over 200,000 questionnaires distributed nationwide.

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The survey reveals that the country has over 23 million Protestants, about 1.8 percent of the total population. Over 60 percent are in the 35-64 age range, which suggest an ageing congregation, and 68.8 percent are female.

More than half are not educated beyond high school level. Nearly 70 percent say they became a Protestant through circumstances such as personal or family sickness, which made them turn to religion.

The survey stresses that all its statistics should be viewed as estimates only as many people are reluctant to divulge too much about their faith due to China's political sensitivities.

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## **South China Morning Post**

### **23m Christians on the mainland, figures show**

**Priscilla Jiao**

**Aug 12, 2010**

Christians on the mainland now number some 23 million, accounting for 1.8 per cent of the population, according to the first official figures compiled on the country's religions released yesterday in Beijing.

The Blue Book of Religions in China, compiled by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of World Religions, revealed that nearly 70 per cent of Christians are female and about 67 per cent have been baptised. Christians aged between 35 and 64 account for more than 60 per cent of the total number and a quarter are 65 or older.

"Christianity has developed rapidly in recent years, with new believers since 1993 accounting for about three-quarters," editor-in-chief of the Blue Book, Jin Ze said.

Research over the past two years combined household sampling and in-depth investigation in selected areas. The survey collected more than 60,000 questionnaires in nearly 3,000 villages in 321 counties across the mainland.

It also showed that most mainland Christians live in the east and around the Yangtze River region, with nearly three-quarters in eastern and central areas of the country.

The number of Christians in urban areas had risen as young and middle-aged migrant workers from religious strongholds in the countryside left to escape poverty, Jin said.

He hailed the release of the figures as a step forward for the mainland in its policies towards religion.

"It was a breakthrough in China's academic world to reveal such figures based on household sampling. All previous figures have sparked controversy. This time, I was expecting many would criticise the figures as underestimations," he said.

The Reverend Mei Kangjun , from the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China, said: "The survey statistics and ratios echoed a local survey we did a couple of months ago in Shanghai's Puan Church. So I am convinced of the credibility of the statistics. It means that China has taken the first step to face reality and it will be helpful to understand the status of China's churches."

Surveys about religions are still sensitive and many believers hide their faith. The Blue Book says its statistics are "just minimum estimates".

Other estimates have ranged from 40 million to 130 million Christians. The China Aid Association has quoted Ye Xiaowen , former director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, as saying that the number of Christians had grown to 130 million in 2006, but that figure has been officially denied by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Recent research has suggested there are about 54 million Christians on the mainland, according to the Christian Examiner. Most believed there were about 700,000 Christians when the People's Republic was founded in 1949.

"There is no point discussing the number of Christians who are not officially recognised. The number of 23 million already suggests rapid growth in the number of Christians," Mei said. "The unrecognised ones would be increasing similarly."

The survey results suggested that about a quarter of Christians engage in religious activities at home.

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