



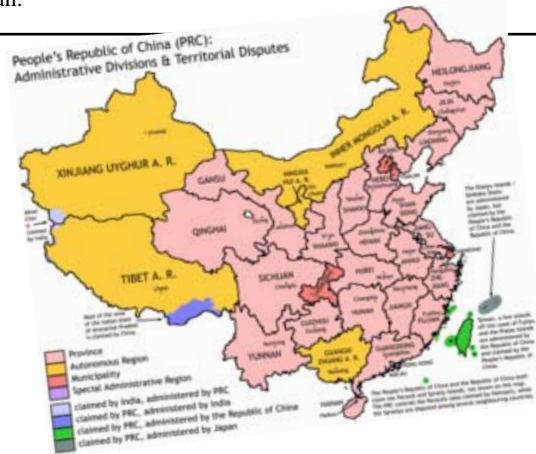
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Kingdom-focussed E-Mail news-bulletin with inspiring reports of God at work around the world, with special emphasis on the current global reformation of Church and Missions. **Editor:** Wolfgang Simson. Subscription: €30/ US-\$ 40 per year. Freitagfax 2.0, PO Box 1248, D-79397 Kandern, Germany. Email info@ffax2.com; website: www.ffax2.com. © Dawn Europa e.V.; 22 issues per year, available in English and German.

China: 200 Million followers of Christ by now?

“An astounding manifestation of Apostolic Genius is that unique and explosive power inherent in all of God’s people, namely the underground church in China”, writes Australian reformer Alan Hirsch in his newly released book “Forgotten Ways”. “About the time of Mao Tse-tung the church in China, well established and largely modeled on Western forms due to colonization, was estimated to number about 2 million adherents. As part of a systematic persecution, Mao banished all foreign missionaries, nationalized church property, killed all the senior leaders, killed or imprisoned all second- and third-level leaders, banned all public meetings of Christians with the threat of death or torture. The explicit aim of the Cultural Revolution was to obliterate Christianity (and all religion) from China,” writes Alan.



Now, two generations later, let us look at the status of Maos’ goal. The number of Christians in China has always been a matter of debate. Estimates usually fell into three categories, very much like in the predominately Muslim countries:

- 1) The official numbers (between 10 and 16 million) given by the Chinese government, the numbers were always understated and downplayed, as they posed a national embarrassment to the goals of the Cultural Revolution. There have been (leaks of) confidential estimates from the State Statistical Bureau in China, however, that for example, estimate 63 million Protestants and 12 million Catholics in 1992, writes Patrick Johnstone in “Operation World”. (Beijing officially recognizes five religions: Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Catholicism and Protestant Christianity.)
- 2) The conservative (Christian) estimates used to number the Christians in China between 35 to 80 million, amongst them former journalist of TIME magazine, David Aikman.
- 3) The progressive number, actively recognizing the widespread existence and proliferation of underground housechurches in China. This number, in the last decade, has been ranking between 60 and 135 million, depending on sources.

Official numbers of “believers” three times higher

In February 2007, “China Daily”- newspaper and mouthpiece of the official Communist Party in China, has acknowledged a dramatic religious revival in China. For the first time the results of a survey conducted by professors Tong Shijun and Liu Zhongyu of East China Normal University in Shanghai was published, suggesting the number of adherents of religions is three times the official figure. The number of Christians was officially stated as 40 million (however, this would only include those part of State-registered churches.) In an internal report Yie Xiaowen, director of the governments religious authority, spoke of 130 million Christians, 20 million of them Catholics.

“Beijing also accepts by implication that there are tens of millions of Christians who do not worship in state-registered churches”, says Richard Spencer (The Daily Telegraph). The survey said 31% of the adult population — defined as over 16 — described themselves as religious, which works out to be about 300 million people. Official figures said until then that there are 100 million religious adherents, a number which the paper noted without comment “has remained largely unchanged for years.” It described the new number as “startling.” The biggest growth amongst all religious groups in China, says the report, is Christianity. Prof. Liu said that rural areas of China were most affected by the phenomenon, and “large portions of new believers come from economically developed coastal areas”. And, it is not only the old, but also the younger generations that

represent that shift. The average age of believers has dropped: around two-thirds of those interviewed were aged between 16 and 35 while only 9.6% were 55 years or more, reports Asia News.

This would mean that by now, 2007, China *officially* has admitted 40 million Christians to exist in China (as compared to 10-16 million before); *unofficially*, the numbers in circulation inside the government are 110 million Protestants, and 20 million Catholics. If the previous level of government information on the actual number of born-again believers in China is any indication, then the real numbers have always been somewhere between three to eight times higher than the ones published officially by the government. Given many other sources that report from China an ongoing growth and multiplication of housechurch movements, it would not only be absolutely possible that the number of followers of Christ in China have by now passed the 200-million barrier, but this would be very realistic. Out of the currently 1,3 billion population of China, this would mean that already more than 15% percent of all Chinese are actively following Christ.

How evil schemes can work out for good (Rom 8:28)

Many close observers trace the numerical explosion of the Chinese housechurches back to four things that Mao and his Cultural Revolution did to the Church:

- 1) Systematic persecution with the very real threat of total annihilation seriously raised the price of becoming a Christian. To convert to Jesus Christ became basically synonymous to having given up life and being ready to die for one's faith.
- 2) Banishing missionaries removed the stifling influence of colonializing and stagnating, dysfunctional, Western Churchianity and forced the Chinese followers of Christ to develop own, indigenous and Non-Western forms of church.
- 3) Killing all senior, second- and third-level leadership of Christians forcefully removed the biggest stopper of organic, multiplying growth traditional Christianity knows: static, stifling, pharaohnic and highly qualified and professional leaders obstructing the following generations to naturally grow into responsibility. Removing the first three levels of ecclesial hierarchy forced "Brother and Sister Normal" into action and threw them into the water like nothing else would ever have, therefore thrusting many thousands into taking responsibility.
- 4) Banning public meetings and nationalizing church property delivered the church from the amazingly effective cage of building- and programme-based Christianity, freed it from a Constantinian mindset and being forever focused on a edifice-complex. Without this deliverance to happen, church multiplication would always automatically mean the multiplication of "sanctuaries", pastors and pews, a process that the Western Church has proven over Millennia to be too costly, time-consuming and anti-organic in order to truly spread the gospel. The Maoist Revolution and surely not the Missionaries, Pastors and their own structures had allowed the Chinese Christians to stop bringing people to "church", and start bringing the church to the people with amazing results. Many Christian leaders in China have said, publicly or in private: "Thank God for Mao!"

Is there something here that the rest of the world could learn from this – without paying the costly and gruesome price for these lessons?



Parachute Churchplanting

One of the reasons for the proliferation of house-churchplanting in China is the planting of churches inside businesses owned and run by followers of Christ or those favourable to Jesus. The business, like a factory or an office complex, for example, would be a safe haven and a protected area to allow a church – or several of them – to be planted, with the permission of the business owner. In such a way, workers could be part of a church, understood as an organic family sharing lives with Christ and each other, literally where they work, and be protected from inquisitions of the government by their company. As sometimes these business-based churches would literally drop from the sky like someone parachuting, and being implemented top-down (with the consent of the top CEO), this has come to be called by some as "parachute Churchplanting".

Recommended reading: Alan Hirsch, "The Forgotten Ways" www.theforgottenways.org
"Hirsch has discovered the formula that unlocks the secrets of the ecclesial universe like Einstein's simple formula $E=mc^2$ unlocked the secrets of the physical universe. There are some books good enough to read to the end. There are only a few books good enough to read to the end of time. The Forgotten Ways is one of them." Leonard Sweet (from the foreword).

