

Is Persecution of Christians in China as Bad as They Say?

“Is the smog as bad as they say?” is a regular question from people in America. The answer, regrettably, some days is “yes.” There were only five acceptable days—smog-wise—in January, according to the Chinese government.

The next question from many Christians is, “Is the persecution of Christians as bad as they say?” The answer is much more complex. While persecution does not cover China like the smog, many of the bad things you have heard are generally true. Nevertheless, there are profoundly wonderful things happening as well.

Working in downtown Beijing for , helping top Chinese students go to top American schools, I walk through many nice indoor malls to avoid the weather and the smog. While there, I have seen and heard Christianity expressed in public. I have been in restaurants with Christian music playing. I was moved to tears the first time I heard a real Christmas carol proclaiming Jesus Christ is Lord in English, coming through the background music loud and clear. I have seen people sitting out in public, witnessing over a dog-eared, well-marked Bible. There are many malls in America where neither could occur.

Unlike most westerners who live here, I often ride the subway, and occasionally the bus. It is an incredible experience; one that allows me to see tens of thousands of regular people each time. I have noticed several people reading Christian materials on the subway. I have never seen anyone reading Mao’s Little Red Book. I do not live in an area with many other expatriates. The people I see are almost exclusively Chinese. At meals, we pray over our food, at home and in restaurants. We often hold hands and pray aloud. No one has

ever stopped or questioned us.

My family and I attend a Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) church. I go there because it is the only place the whole family can go legally to church together. They can hear Chinese and I can hear a translation in English and work on my Chinese. There are generally two non-Chinese westerners at the service, me and one other guy, who preaches in the English services in the afternoon. It still touches me greatly to stand with 800 faithful souls as we recite the Apostle's Creed and The Lord's Prayer. They in Chinese and I mostly in English.

I first visited there on Easter Sunday 2012 out of curiosity. When I heard the pastor say, "All government should submit to the authority of Jesus Christ," I knew that I was called to attend that church. I hope and believe that someday soon, services will be broadcast from this church.

Most foreigners go to a church that, at the government's orders, keeps Chinese citizens out. A foreigner attending a house church can put the Chinese there at risk. I did not know that when I first visited China, before I married my wife, so I went to two different house churches. The first had almost 100 people, mostly college students. It met in an apartment building across the street from a top university in Beijing. We sang loudly along with the praise and worship video. I am sure everyone in the building knew there was a church there. The second one met in a rented space in a neighborhood strip mall. It had signage with the word "Love" and a cross. Neither is registered, but neither is hidden in a cave either.

Many Chinese are open and often interested to talk about God. At the rate China and America are changing, there will come a weekend when more people will go to church in China than in America. At that point, perhaps all attendees will feel equally harassed by their government. Please join me in praying that is not the case.

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