

Chinese Underground Church Leader Samuel Lamb Dies

Every Sunday after the service, Chinese pastor Samuel Lamb (also known as Samuel Lam) invited foreign guests into his office and immediately began to tell the story of his life, which he summarized in the one “holy principle” of “more persecution, more growth.”

He experienced Communist oppression and spent more than 20 years in prison. He also experienced God’s response: an amazing growth of the church in China, now estimated at 80 million. Lamb became a hero of the Christian faith for millions of believers inside and outside China.

He passed away on Saturday at the age of 88.

Lamb (*Lin Xiangiao* in Chinese) was born in a mountainous area overlooking Macau. His father pastored a small Baptist church, and he was raised as a Christian. Lamb was arrested during one of the first big waves of persecution in Mao’s China and was held in prison from 1955 to 1957.

The Chinese authorities sentenced him a second time in 1958. He spent 20 gruesome years in labor camps, where he mostly worked in coal mines. Despite the harsh punishments, Lamb continued to teach.

The main reason Lamb was targeted by the government was his refusal to merge his illegal house church into the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, the state-led Protestant Church. The government used to forbid Christian leaders to preach about the second coming of Christ and to teach minors under 18 years old. China basically made the state church evolve around the state and not around God.

In 1979, Lamb restarted his house church in 35 Da Ma Zhan in

Guangzhou. Attendance grew quickly, and he moved his congregation to a bigger building in the same city. Now his urban house church is still unregistered but tolerated by the authorities. The church has over 4,000 attendees each week with four services.

Lamb's theology challenged the government, the attendees of his church as well as other believers inside and outside China. He taught that Christians should obey the government unless those leaders directly oppose God with their law enforcement. "The laws of God are more important than the laws of man," he said.

Suffering played an important part in many of Lamb's sermons. He repeated "more persecution, more growth." That phrase had not only to do with numbers of believers, but also with spiritual growth.

"I can understand Job's victories and Job's defeats," he often said. "It taught me that grumbling does not help—not against God and not against those who persecuted me. My dear wife died while I was in prison. I was not allowed to attend her funeral. It was like an arrow of the Almighty, until I understood that God allows the pain, the loss, the torture; but we must grow through it."

Lamb always remained cautious about the government. Even though his congregation is still illegal, it hasn't been raided in years. He always warned, "We must be prepared to suffer. We must be prepared for the fact that we may be arrested. Before I was sent to prison, I already prepared a bag with some clothes, shoes and a toothbrush. When I had to go to the police station, I could just pick it up. I was ready.

"People are still being arrested. You don't know what will happen tomorrow. Today the authorities are not bothering us. But tomorrow things may be different. I pray that we will

receive the strength to stand firm.”

In the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, Lamb proved to be a reliable partner for Open Doors’ ministry. Through his network, over 200,000 pieces of Christian literature were delivered to Chinese believers.

“The death of Samuel Lamb leaves a hole in the Chinese church,” says an Open Doors spokesperson. “Together with other heroes of faith like Wang Mindao and Allen Yuan, he symbolized the brave faith of a church that grew at an unprecedented speed in world history. Long after his passing, it will be said in many churches that more persecution only has one outcome: more growth.”