

Testimonies of Faithfulness: Celebrating China's Christians

This week, on Oct. 1, the Chinese celebrate a national holiday. It marks the 75th anniversary of Mao Zedong officially establishing communist rule in China. In 1949, when the communists drove Christian missionaries out of China and persecuted the 1 million Chinese Christians, no one expected Christianity to survive.

To many Chinese, the church had become associated with the Western powers which had humiliated China over the previous 100 years. The traditional religionists who had seen their deified emperor overthrown in 1912 blamed the church for their decline, while the secular communists painted the Christians as enemies of the state. Many Christians died or were imprisoned as communist leader Mao Zedong tried to crush Christianity.

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Like the ancient Caesars, however, Mao did not understand that the kingdom of God was inside believers, giving them strength to endure under persecution. The removal of the missionaries failed to end Christianity; it simply made the church into a wholly Chinese enterprise. When its property was confiscated, it moved into the homes. And when its Chinese leaders were imprisoned, the Holy Spirit provided new leaders.

As it did during the Roman persecution, the church provided hope in a brutal society and kept growing. Instead of fading away, today, the Chinese church has 115 million believers.

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Even so, the current successor to Mao, Xi Jinping, has renewed the attack on the church, closing churches and persecuting members. The Communist Party has adopted laws trying to force Christians to secularize their faith and practice core values of socialism, including putting state authority over God. Faithful Christians are subject to loss of homes, loss of jobs and imprisonment. Noncompliant churches are torn down, and the members are scattered.

Still, the Chinese remain steadfast, as expressed by imprisoned Pastor Wang Yi: "The Rulers have chosen an enemy that can never be imprisoned—the soul of man. Therefore, they are doomed to lose their war."

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