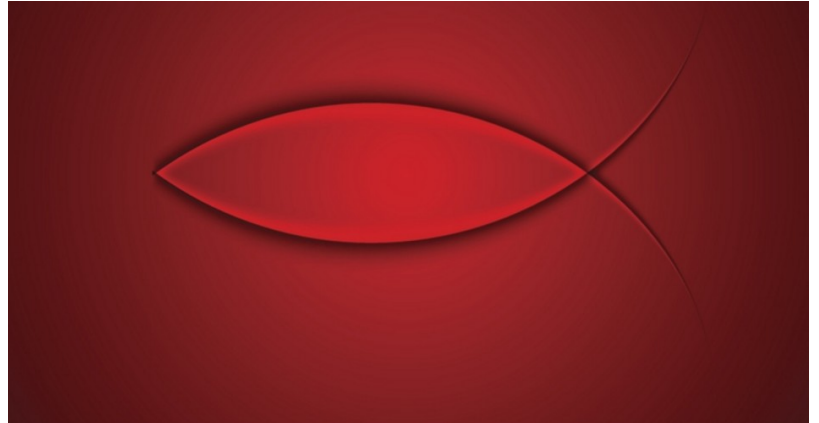




Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on July 11, 2014

China Sentences Christian Pastor to 12-year Prison Term

Communist China has been engaged in a high-profile attack against the Christian faith over the past year, and its most public display of antagonism came earlier this month against a pastor in the Henan Province. The [New York Times](#) reported that Zhang Shaojie, pastor of the Nanle County Christian Church, was sentenced July 4 by a Communist Chinese court to 12 years in prison for the supposed crimes of fraud and “gathering crowds to disturb public order.” The 49-year-old pastor was also fined 100,000 renminbi, or about \$16,000.□



Zhang’s attorney, Yang Xingquan, has steadfastly insisted that his client has done nothing wrong, but is being targeted by a Chinese government that wants to put the brakes on the dramatic growth of Christianity in the nation. As reported by [The New American](#) in April, China is on a growth track to become the world’s most Christian nation in the next 15 years. According to Fenggang Yang, a professor of sociology at Purdue University and one of the leading experts on faith and religion in China, by 2030 the total number of both Protestant and Catholic Christians in officially atheist China could exceed 247 million, putting it ahead of Mexico, Brazil, and the United States as the most Christian nation in the world. “Mao thought he could eliminate religion,” Yang observed of the communist country’s murderous founder. “He thought he had accomplished this. It’s ironic — they [China’s communist regime] didn’t. They actually failed completely.”

But that has not prevented the present regime from walking in Mao’s oppressive footsteps relative to the faith. According to [The New American’s](#) Alex Newman, Chinese officials have destroyed several churches over the past several months, including some that have been officially sanctioned under the government’s approved Protestant licensing group, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement.

One of the most shocking examples of China’s ruthless campaign against faith came in late April against Sanjiang Church, a Three-Self Patriotic congregation, when communist authorities demanded the destruction of its beautiful church facility. “In response, over 1,000 faithful assembled at the church to protect it from government demolition squads,” reported Newman. “The local branch of the regime responded with over 100 heavily armed SWAT officers and paramilitary units before sending in machinery to raze the \$5 million church to the ground on April 28.”

In Pastor Zhang’s case, his congregation was also approved, and Zhang was the president of the local branch of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. That, however, didn’t keep him from getting on the wrong side of the regime’s ire, when a dispute over land and the supposedly “dilapidated” condition of the church building led a group of church members to travel to Beijing to petition authorities. The group was forcibly returned home by Nanle authorities worried about the negative impact of their complaints, and when Zhang intervened to help, he was also arrested.

“In the eyes of the authorities, Christianity is growing too fast there and Pastor Zhang was too influential,” attorney Yang Xingquan said of the case and Zhang’s sentence.



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Bob Fu, president of the U.S.-based Christian rights group China Aid, agreed, calling Zhang's conviction "totally unacceptable," and charging that his case "shows the Chinese government continues to cover up religious persecution with fabricated criminal charges against an innocent church leader."

Even the U.S. State Department considered the actions against Zhang of sufficient concern to offer a statement. State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki expressed her "deep concern" over Zhang's plight, and called on "Chinese authorities to release Pastor Zhang and ... to cease harassment of his family members and congregants." She further called on the regime "to allow citizens to worship freely in accordance with China's own laws and its international human rights commitments."

Psaki emphasized that "freedom of religion is critical to a peaceful, inclusive, stable, and thriving society" — counsel that her ultimate superior would be wise to embrace.



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