



China's Back to Jerusalem Movement

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March 2015

Abstract

This article examines how China is rapidly becoming the world's largest Christian nation, and considers the strategic significance of how Beijing may be the West's next ally against radical Islam.

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Analysis

Recently there has been much writing on how Christianity in the Middle East is facing extinction as the scourge of ISIS advances in the region. Titles like “Christianity faces extinction in Middle East,” “Christians Presence in Middle East Threatened with Extinction,” “Is this the end for Mideast Christians?” and others abound in a seemingly hopeless situation.

It does look hopeless. The most wrenching stories have come from Iraq where ISIS has savagely persecuted ancient Christian communities, including Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Syrian Orthodox.

In a reminder of Nazi savagery against Jews, Christian homes were marked with the Arabic letter ن for Nazarenes¹ – Christ followers, and inhabitants were targets for abuse or murder.



The Arabic letter “n” (inside red circle), signifying “Nasrani” (Christian), on a Christian home in Mosul.

As such hundreds of thousands of Christians across Iraq and Syria have fled their homes to Iraqi Kurdistan and neighboring countries, and the warning of a potential genocide of Christians and other minorities in the Middle East comes at the centenary of another genocide, in which up to 3.75 million Christians (Armenians, Assyrians, and Ottoman Greeks) died in a period of 30 years and which peaked in 1915.

However, as darkness descends upon the region, a light is kindling in the East and spreading west on the Silk Road towards this heart of darkness.

What is not reported in mainstream media is that Christianity in the Mideast is not yet facing extinction, as new Christians from the East are migrating to help in the region – Chinese Christians. China, currently experiencing the largest Christian movement in the world, is marching west.

Jesus in Beijing

Though the Chinese Communist Party is the largest explicitly atheist organization in the world with 85 million official numbers, this is overshadowed by an estimated 130 million Christians in China. Growing by an average of 10% a year since 1980, Yang Fenggang of Purdue University estimates there will be 250 million Christians by 2030, making China’s Christian population the largest in the world. Several million of them are in the Chinese Communist Party.

¹ <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/383493/christian-genocide-symbolized-one-letter-christine-sisto>



And as Christianity rises in China, especially the unregistered underground house churches, a movement has been welling in its midst – the ‘Back to Jerusalem’ movement. Birthed in the 1900s, it was a vision of Chinese missionaries to spread the Gospel from the east coast of China through the landlocked Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim lands until it reached where Christianity was first born – back to Jerusalem.²

David Aikman, a former *Time* magazine Beijing bureau chief, first reported this phenomenon in his 2003 book “Jesus in Beijing”.³

Aikman documented how Christianity was transforming China and changing the global balance of power, noting how Christianity has won over key members of the Chinese Communist Party and the prospect of China becoming the West’s next ally against radical Islam.

As the West has become more secular and western missionaries have been dwindling, Chinese missionaries are riding the waves of China’s rise and reaching far corners of the globe, including areas not easily accessible to Westerners such as Sudan, Iran, North Korea and Syria.

Back to Jerusalem teams have already been in these countries for several years, providing humanitarian relief, health and medical services, building infrastructures, serving as interpreters and ministering to the persecuted people. Many of them had enrolled in Arabic language programs or have been trained by Arabic-speaking Christians to work in the Islamic world.

“[We] have been providing aid to the Iraqis in Turkey by supplying food, tents, blankets, and yogurt with the aid that we have received from around the world....Now we are working in northern Iraq and currently providing a long term solution to the lack of food.”

When asked whether they were fearful of facing persecution themselves and perhaps martyred for their efforts in this region, they responded no. The Chinese Christians state that they had been trained to deal with persecution within Communist China for several decades, and are well prepared to carry out their missions especially in autocratic and Muslim countries.

A pro-Israeli China?

In 2002 while reporting for his book, Aikman also observed there was “an overwhelmingly pro-Israeli feeling among China’s Christians, which contrasted sharply with China’s official government position of supporting Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular.”

At that time, Aikman noted the “future strategic significance of an important component of China’s population being pro-Israeli is well worth considering.”

Prescient advice as more than a decade later, even as Israel faces increasing boycott and isolation from the West, China and Israel’s relation continues to bloom. And while the Middle East Christians feel they have been abandoned by the West, help is coming towards them from the East, as China marches on the Silk Road back to Jerusalem.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

² <https://vimeo.com/39454827>

³ <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/59876/lucian-w-pye/jesus-in-beijing-how-christianity-is-transforming-china-and-chan>