



Protestant Home Church banned for “collaborating with Korea”

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It is the Church of Berea "River of Life" in Fujian. They reportedly opened a theological research institute and various places of worship. Pressure for greater openness in regulations governing religious freedom. Domestic churches do not "disturb the social order". Repression towards Christians is leading many faithful to choose the "outlawed" path of underground practice outside official channels.

Beijing (AsiaNews / CP) - A protestant domestic church has been declared outlawed in Fujian Province and accused of "establishing religious sites" and "collaborating with South Korea."

The news was published yesterday on the Christian Post. The authorities accused the Church of Berea [a Protestant denomination] "River of Life" for having opened a theology institute, supported by money from Korea, and having set up several places of worship. They also seized 1,346 yuan (about US \$ 200) of donations, as "illegal revenue".

The "River of Life" community was founded eight years ago and has gathered dozens of faithful every Sunday.

Tens of millions of Protestant Christians prefer to practice their faith in the so-called "domestic churches", which are not registered with the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This makes them illegal. But in the Protestant world there is growing pressure to widen religious freedom even to unregistered communities, provided they are not "evil cults", with negative consequences on the population and government.

An attorney who is studying the case of the "River of Life" Church states that "it is ridiculous to arrest someone because he participates in Christian meetings at home. The government often uses the excuse that Christians' disturb the social order 'to persecute them.'

In the case of the outlawed community, there is also a link with a foreign country that, according to government regulations, should be monitored and avoided as much as possible to create "national and patriotic" communities. Pastor Zhang, interviewed by China Aid notes: "Since religions are founded in different countries, the people are unavoidably 'collaborating with foreign powers' when they choose a religious belief. Jesus himself was a foreigner. This logic is ridiculous. Our government has armed itself to the teeth in order to control people's minds."

Last month Doug Bandow, of the Cato Institute, said that "President Xi Jinping's China is becoming more and more fearful," as the government continues to suppress all dissent and contacts with the West.

For Bandow, the growing persecution in China shows that "the Communist god who has failed, fears competition [with other religions]".

In a commentary published in the Japan Times, Bandow notes that despite religious persecution, economic reforms undertaken by China "have enlarged the space for the expression of faith" and that "freedom cannot be easily narrowed."

Bandow cites a recent report by Freedom House (a USA body for Religious Freedom), in which it is noted that repression against Christians in China rather than checking religion's natural expansion and keeping it under political control, has essentially created an enormous black market, forcing many believers to operate outside the law and to view the regime as "unreasonable, unjust, or illegitimate."