

# The Right to Worship Holds for All Faiths

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The nighttime demolition of a Moscow Pentecostal church by unidentified men under the protection of the city police would not have been surprising in the Soviet era. But not in 2012.

While much remains unknown about why the three-story Holy Trinity Pentecostal Church was raided and razed Wednesday night, one thing is clear: Freedom of religion is under attack. Even more worrisome, the assault is not happening in some provincial backwater but in the nation's capital.

The right to worship is enshrined in the 1993 Constitution. But after a few heady post-Soviet years in which thousands of faiths sprang up and flourished across Russia, the Kremlin stepped in at the urging of the Russian Orthodox Church to "protect" the Russian people from "foreign sects." A major blow was dealt to religious freedom with the passage of a 1997 law that described four faiths as "traditional" in Russia — Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism — and afforded them special privileges. Many of the other faiths were forced to meet tough requirements to register with the authorities.

Pressure from the Russian Orthodox Church has been blamed for the inability of some Protestant churches to fully legalize their buildings in Moscow and other parts of the country by registering them with the authorities. Why the Holy Trinity Pentecostal Church had been unable to register its building for more than a decade should be a question for the courts. But it was a city court that handed down the decision to destroy the church, and a lack of proper documents is no excuse for a midnight raid.

One wonders whether the Pentecostal believers will be allowed to sue City Hall, the police or the attackers for insulting their feelings. Isn't it blasphemy or hooliganism motivated by religious hatred to raze and loot a church?

Tellingly, the Russian Orthodox Church didn't have any problems securing 200 plots for new churches around Moscow recently.

What happened to the Pentecostal church last week should serve as a wake-up call to people of all faiths. Religious freedom is protected only as far as the right is extended to the smallest or least significant of religious communities. If City Hall and unknown vandals come after Pentecostal believers today, who's to say that they won't come after Catholics, Muslims, Jews or even Russian Orthodox believers tomorrow? It wasn't so long ago that shadowy men pursued all believers under the cover of darkness.

*See related article: [Pentecostal Church Looted, Razed](#)*

*The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.*

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