

An Agenda for Chinese Christians in the Marketplace

Contributed by Administrator
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- I. Discipleship
- II. Evangelism
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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â From its modest beginnings in the early nineteenth century, the Chinese church has grown in both number and maturity. Today, the Chinese church in North America faces the challenge of evangelization and discipling in a multicultural society. Indeed, the Chinese church itself is a multicultural community. Chinese culture itself is also changing. Cultural diversity and cultural change present tremendous challenges to the task of making disciples. Nowhere is the pressure greatest than in the lives of theÂ Â laity, who live and work daily in the marketplace.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â What is our responsibility as Christians in the world? To bring men and women into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. To teach them all that Christ commanded. To bring them through baptism into the body of Christ, the church. To proclaim justice and liberation for the poor. To demonstrate the Lordship of Christ over our professions. To participate in the ministry of the church so that she truly becomes salt and light, penetrating every stratum and sector of society with the power of the gospel. To do any or all of these, we need to be constantly growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. How does this work out specifically for Christians in the 1980's and 1990's? We will seek to explore several viable working models.

I. Discipleship

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Someone has once said, "the beginning of evangelism is follow-up."⁽¹⁾ That is to say, if new Christians are properly grounded in the faith and learn how to fellowship with God and Christians, how to pray, and how to share their faith, the task of evangelism in the church will naturally take care of itself.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â The Chinese church has traditionally emphasized mass meetings as the primary means of evangelism. This may be a reflection of the communal function which religion played in traditional Chinese society. Funerals and festivals have served to consolidate and preserve the values of the clan. Likewise, evangelistic crusades are visible ways to proclaim the values of the Chinese evangelical community.⁽²⁾

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â However, as young people grow up in a modern society characterized by choice and the quest for individual development, a more personalized approach to evangelism isÂ Â Â needed. It is no accident that personal evangelism and discipleship methods have beenÂ more acceptable in the past ten years, mostly introduced into the Chinese church byÂ Â Â western evangelical movements (e.g. Campus Crusade, Evangelism Explosion, the Navigators). The goal is not just decisions for Christ, whether made at a crusade or at the end of a visitation call. Rather, the objective is to incorporate a disciple of Christ into the life and ministry of the church.⁽³⁾

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Because of the relative short history of systematic personal discipleship ministries in the Chinese church, Chinese Christians have never been followed up on a one-to-one basis. Consequently, very few Chinese Christians have engaged in the ministry of personal follow-up and disciple-making.⁽⁴⁾ The best way to learn discipleship is byÂ Â Â following someone else. It is best caught rather than taught. How will Chinese Christians learn the "lost art of disciple-making"?

Jesus says that blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs in the kingdom of heaven. When we recognize our need, God will answer. Leroy Eims, in his book *The Lost Art of Disciple-making*, cites several examples of how a ministry of disciple making was started. It started when someone says to his brother, "I am really interested in growing in the Lord. Would you care to join me?" Where Christians seek the face of the Lord together, He will bless. Resources for spiritual growth and disciple-making are readily available today through Christian bookstores and Christian organizations specifically equipped to train disciple-makers.

May the Chinese church be filled with disciple-makers!

II. Evangelism

The 1960's was a great period in evangelism among the Chinese in North America.⁽⁵⁾ Student Bible study groups were formed by Christian students themselves. Evangelists and evangelistic groups traveled across North America. In the 1970's, students and graduates began to form new Chinese churches -- hundreds of them. Today, in the 1980's, the Chinese church has "come of age." She is respectable, complete with buildings, pastoral staff, and missions programs. However, in many quarters the simple, single-hearted zeal for evangelism has been lost.

We spend our time and energy devising and staffing programs in the church (and in the student fellowships). Jesus called us to be fishers of men, we seem to fill the church with aquarium keepers. The church needs both aquarium keepers (whose ministry is to "keep the fish happy") and fishermen. The problem is that the ratio of fishermen to the total church population is so small, that evangelism is not given its proper place.

I began my church planting ministry seven years ago. Today my legs still shake when I pass out tracts. I do evangelistic calls. But the good news is that God has put people out there who not only need the gospel, but even desire it! And the best way to get to them is through Christian laypeople, as they reach out to their friends, relatives, and colleagues. Evangelistic training such as *Evangelism Explosion* can really instill boldness in the lives of participants -- but the key is the commitment by each Christian to reach out in love to their friends, relatives, and neighbors.

III. Business

More and more Chinese Christians, college educated or otherwise, are entering the world of retail business. What better place to witness to the transforming power of Jesus Christ than in the marketplace itself! In past generations, many godly and generous Chinese Christian businessmen have set a good example of serving the Lord and contributing to His work. Today, the same challenge faces our generation.⁽⁶⁾ One model of maintaining a Christian witness in the business world is to set up a corporation upon Christian ethical standards. (The fact that these standards are based on the Christian faith of the founders need not be stated overtly.) An example of this can be found in the "creed" of Silver Dollar City, an American corporation based in Branson, Missouri, which operates several entertainment parks. SDC's staff and associates will "do everything within their ability to assure guests full value for their investment by providing:

1. An atmosphere noted for its friendliness, cleanliness, safety, and theme.

2. A consistently high quality of product and services.

3. Entertainment suitable for families and, where appropriate, featuring the preservation of history.

4. An ever improving level of productivity in delivering such services and products to guests."

The company has committed itself to the belief that the employees are its greatest asset in meeting the needs of the customers. Consequently, the corporation will:

"1. Return to employees and associates a share of the profits generated by their productivity in the form of wages and benefits as well as profit sharing.

2. Provide, where possible, development and career opportunities which will allow each individual to personally and professionally become all they can be.

3. Recognize individual achievement through fair appraisal and recognition of performance."⁽⁷⁾

Chinese businesspeople traditionally do not rely on formal written agreements, but do business through familiarity and trust.⁽⁸⁾ However, as Christians enter the modern world of enterprise, a written commitment to the highest principles in business may be appropriate.

Another way to bring the Christian faith to bear on one's business is to commit a portion of one's profits to Christian causes. A Chinese church on the east coast in the U.S. has helped its members to do so in a number of

cases. InterLink, Inc., an American evangelization organization based in Wheaton, Illinois, seeks to mobilize Christian business and professional people to commit a percentage of their annual profits to invest (not donate) in indigenous Third World for-profit enterprises. The goal is that the indigenous Christians will one day buy out the Americans' share and become an ongoing witness in their own culture of the transforming power of Christ.

The task of maintaining pure ethical standards in the business world is not easy. Support systems and networking are needed. The encouragement of pastors and Christian leaders can go a long way to undergird these enterprises.⁽⁹⁾

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IV. Professions

Chinese Christian professionals have traditionally lived a life of spiritual and intellectual schizophrenia. Their Christian faith is not integrated into their professional lives. Among evangelicals in the west, a few models may challenge us to live a life of fuller obedience to Christ.

One way to witness as professionals is to form Christian professional associations. For example, a subcommittee may be formed in many professional associations. Or a separate Christian group, such as the American Scientific Affiliation, may be organized. Chinese Christians may choose to join one or more of these organizations.

A second way is to conduct research which seek to incorporate Christian principles. Here I have more the evolution vs. creation in mind. There are many ways in which a Biblical world and life view may guide our research. An outstanding way in which a Christian scientist seeks to re-interpret the very structure of knowledge itself is found in Vern Poythress' Philosophy, Science and the Sovereignty of God (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company).

A third model is to form an interdisciplinary study group around a common theme. John Stott in London and Christianity Today Institute in Wheaton, Illinois have pioneered two such attempts.

The key behind these models is an adequate, biblically sound theological foundation. Training in biblical systematic theology, applied to the world of science and scholarship, should be a continuing part of any Christian professional's development. This may not be available in most Chinese churches, but specialized organizations in Canada and the U.S. offer such training regularly.

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V. Church Growth

There are seven hundred Chinese churches in North America. Several dozen are growing rapidly and multiplying. Many are stagnant. Chinese Christian professionals are found in almost every one of them. What can they do to promote their church's growth?

This is not the place to discuss the strategies and methods of church growth. Literature on this subject and a Christian only need to read two or three good books in this area. But I believe the crucial area which needs to be discussed is relationships in the church.

It is a well known fact that Chinese churches multiply themselves by splitting. Relationships between past people (lay leaders) have turned sour and bitter. Each side has his story to tell. Both need healing and forgiveness.

It is instructive for us to look at how Jesus viewed the church in a crisis situation. As he rode into Jerusalem crowds waited to greet and listen to him; the Pharisees were planning to kill him; and he himself was preparing for the "hour" when the Father would be glorified -- the hour of his death. The church was far from perfect at that hour. What did Jesus do?

First, he wept. He wept over Jerusalem. Weeping is an expression of prayerful concern for the welfare of people. We Christians need to learn to weep for the church today.

Second, he went to the temple and chased out the money changers. When the challenge of the hour was to uphold God's holy standards for the church, Jesus did not refrain. His weeping was not a sentimental weeping; it did not prevent him from exercising his holy anger. We Christians, likewise, need to learn to speak the truth in love, in confrontational situations, when it is our responsibility to do so.

Third, he taught the people in the temple daily. His holy wrath was not an emotional outburst of anger. There were people who needed his teaching during those few days -- every day. And he met their needs -- every day. We

Christians need to learn to be faithful to our responsibilities, even during a period of conflict and crisis.

Fourth, he prayed. He went out to the Mount of Olives every night. Undergirding his concern, his holy work, his faithful ministry was communion with the Father. This was the source of his power.

Today Chinese Christians need to bring God's healing to many a church war. We are so good at in-house combat. Some of us are veterans of many church civil wars. I propose a Veterans Administration hospital for such wounded soldiers. This hospital has two special admission requirements:

1. That every patient be enrolled in the hospital's school of nursing. As we recover from our wounds, we need to learn to nurse the wounds of others.(10)

2. That every patient be also enrolled in a school of horticulture next door to the hospital to learn the art of gardening. We need to unlearn the skills of in-house fighting, and learn the art of gardening. And the garden has a name: the church of Jesus Christ, offering a haven of rest and a word of mercy and hope to a needy, hurting world.

All of this presupposes a certain amount of honesty with ourselves -- our past mistakes, our personality and character flaws, our hurts and wounds. Dare we take a look at ourselves -- and then run to the cross, unload our baggage, and begin to grow?

VI. Church Planting

There are seven hundred Chinese churches in North America. Together, we are reaching 5% of the Chinese community. In the next 10-15 years, there will be another seven hundred new Chinese churches started. The question is: what kind of church will we start?

Someone has once said that church planting is the purest way to accomplish the Great Commission. And church planting is becoming a buzz-word among evangelical mission leaders. Several denominations have adopted aggressive plans to plant many Chinese churches across Canada and the U.S. My concern here is: what kind of lay leader and church planter will be needed, in order to staff a great movement of church planting among the Chinese in North America?(11)

We are going to need Christians who are trained and experienced in personal evangelism and discipleship. We are going to need love-filled Christian homes, where wife and husband live in mutual respect and love. It is much easier to invite an unchurched person (or a visitor to the church) to your home, than to visit his/her home. Wives, loved by their husbands and responding in love in the home, are the crucial factor in making a Christian home hospitable to the visitor.

We are going to need Christians who have what Win Arn calls a Great Commission Conscience. That is they see themselves as fishers of men, rather than aquarium keepers, in the total ministry of the church. If given the choice, they would opt for ministries of outreach rather than "inreach." They are trained in at least one method of evangelism or discipleship. Their whole orientation is to reach out to the unchurched with the love of Christ.

There are many potential fishers of men in the Chinese church. Some of them need to be trained in evangelism. Some of them need to be healed from past hurts, liberated from burdens from their past. And as they see and follow examples of fishing for men, they will become amazed at what God wants to do through their lives.

Many churches have yet to be established among the 20 people groups in the Chinese community in North America: Cantonese/English, Taiwanese/English, Malaysian-Singaporean, immigrant workers in Chinatown, etc.(12) Who will start what kind of church?

VII. Ministry

Every year, about three hundred Chinese Christian young adults commit their lives at a winter or summer conference to the full time ministry. And every year we see a trickle -- several dozens -- of them enter seminary or Bible college. There are about 400 Chinese seminary or Bible college students in North America. What is happening?

I believe that God has called many to the pastoral preaching ministry. But due to many factors, many are not responding. Let me say immediately that there are many whom God has not called. Many Christians will discover, years after they have made a decision for full time work at a retreat, that God is calling them into the "secular" professions. Such Christians, especially women who marry Christians not called into full time work, need to be reassured and re-commissioned into their new role without carrying a burden of guilt for the rest of their lives.

But God has called some. He has called many. I believe that there should be three groups of full time ministers emerging in coming years:

1. College graduates entering seminary, followed by internship in church ministry. This is the traditional route. The problem lies in the critical need for internship, both during and after the seminary experience. Very few Chinese churches provide such internship opportunities.(13)

2. Young professionals who have 3-5 years of experience in the marketplace. They have tested out their ambitions, and come to crucify them. They are now responding to God's claim upon their lives in full time ministry. The average age of the American seminary student today is around 32. These people make a powerful force for God's kingdom, bringing with them "secular" credentials and some measure of experience and maturity. (14)

3. Professional people in their 40's and 50's, who quietly in their own hearts know that God is calling them into full time work. A few of them have entered seminary and are preparing themselves for the ministry or missionary work.(15)

All three types of workers will be useful in God's kingdom. The key is: we need workers filled with freedom, security in Christ, free from guilt, a sense of inferiority and insecurity, and freed from fleshly pride. Evangelical seminaries are available to provide solid biblical and theological training;(16) many innovative programs are available to supplement this with training in Chinese church history and ministry skills in the Chinese church.

The fields are white unto harvest. Whom will God send?

Conclusion

An immediate need in the Chinese church is the education of the Christian lay professionals in the pew. A powerful force for the kingdom! What a pool of untapped potential. I propose a basic curriculum for every Christian:

1. Personal evangelism
2. Disciple-making
3. Basic Bible content
4. Bible study methods
5. Basic Christian counseling
6. Survey of Christian doctrine
7. Self and time management

May seminary bring such training to the church; may the Christian layperson earnestly seek such training. Together, we will bring the gospel of Christ to the marketplace.

Notes.

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3. Win Arn and Charles Arn, The Master's Plan for Making Disciples (Pasadena: Church Growth Press, 1982); Leroy Eims, The Lost Art of Disciple Making (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978); and D. James Kennedy, Evangelism Explosion (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1983).

4. I have been doing surveys among church youth groups and student fellowships on the east coast of the U.S.A. on the prevalence of follow-up/disciplemaking among Chinese Christians.

5. Wai-Fong Lo, ed., "North America," Diaspora Chinese Church, Vol. 5 (Hong Kong: Chinese Coordination Centre of World Evangelism, 1986), 5-41.

6. John Chang, "Chieh tai chih shih feng k'ai fa hua jen chiao hui chih yuan" (Developing resources for the Chinese church through tentmaking: an interview with Dr. John Chang, financial assistant for the Chinese Coordination Centre of World Evangelism), Chinese Churches Today, November 1984, 12-14.

7. Robert Burton, "Christianity Alive in the Marketplace," Christian Leadership Letter, January 1987.

8. Carver Yu, "Ts'ung hua jen hsing ke k'an chuan fu yin fang ts'e" (Evangelistic strategy considered from the perspective of the Chinese character), Hua jen wen hua yu fu

yun yen t'ao hui hui pao ed. Sharon Chan (Compendium on the Consultation on Chinese Culture and Evangelism) (Hong Kong: Chinese Coordination Centre of World Evangelism, 1986), 21-24.

9. Wesley Shao, "Mu yang shang jen hsin t'u ti yi hsieh ching yen" (Some experiences on pastoring businessmen believers), Pastoral Sharing, September 1981, 7.
10. Philemon Choi, "Wo hsu yao ti hsiung" (I need brothers), Na Han, No. 2(July 1, 1983), 2-3.
11. Felix Liu, "T'ien kuo ti yao shih" (Keys to the kingdom), Chinese Churches Today, March-April 1982, 4-5.
12. Samuel Ling, "Beyond the 'Chinese' Way of Doing Things: The Continued Search for a Theology of Culture," A Winning Combination, ABC/OBC: Understanding the Cultural Tensions in Chinese Churches, ed. Wally Yew (Petaluma, Calif.: Chinese Christian Mission, 1987), 61-82.
13. John L. Ng, "Reflections of a Former Seminarian," Challenger, March 1987, 3-5.
14. Arthur Mak, "Chih shih li suo tang jan" (A reasonable service), Ambassadors, November-December 1986, 32-33.
15. Lee Ting-wu, "Ting on Ting," Renewal, September 1985, 1, 5, 6.
16. Che-Bin Tan, "The Renewal and Breakthrough of Chinese Theological Education in North America," Chinese Around the World, October 1986, 1-4; Samuel Ling, "Hua jen shen hsueh chiao yu li shih yuan ke" (The historical development of Chinese theological education), Chinese Churches Today, September 1984, 23-26.