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How **China's Christians** Can Heal China's Environment

John Copeland Nagle

The Beijing Olympics provided an opportunity for the world to learn more about two seemingly unrelated aspects of life in China: the environmental challenges that China must confront and the challenges facing Christians in China. Images of the polluted skies of Beijing tell only a small part of the story of China's environment.

Many Chinese cities suffer from the world's air pollution, and polluted water has sparked protests in cities and villages throughout the country. At the same time, Christianity is experiencing an unprecedented flourishing in China. The new Christian believers thus have an opportunity to help address the pollution and other environmental problems that are so harmful to many people in China. In this article, I would like to describe the state of China's natural environment, what Christian teaching says about God's creation, and how Chinese

Christians can respond to those who are suffering from the environmental harms in their midst.

China's Environment

China is blessed with abundant natural resources. Over 100,000 species of animals and nearly 33,000 plant species exist in 460 different types of ecosystems. Those ecosystems include forests, grasslands, deserts, wetlands, seas and coastal areas, and agricultural ecosystems.

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The Stewardship Gap

Brent Fulton, Editor

The stewardship of China's resources in this century has profound implications not only for China as a nation but for the world.

As John Nagle points out in "How China's Christians can Heal China's Environment," any list of the world's most polluted cities or rivers will undoubtedly contain a preponderance of entries from China. Should China continue to go the way of Western nations in its reliance on fossil fuels, land use and consumption of food and water resources, the effect upon the environment globally would be disastrous.

The global economic crisis has put China squarely in the spotlight, as the way in which China's leaders choose to steward the nation's vast foreign exchange reserves now directly affects the ability of businesses and even other governments to get on the path to recovery.

In business, a significant soft spot in China's meteoric economic growth has been a dearth of qualified managers. Stewardship of talent—both self-awareness and development of individual abilities as well as the way in which business leaders steward the development of those under them—has been severely overlooked, to the detriment of China's long-term economic prospects.

Just as the West has been less than a shining example to China or to other nations in its consumption of resources and treatment of the environment, so the Western church has offered precious little to Chinese Christians in the broader area of stewardship.

Mark Foreman, in his book *Wholly Jesus*, critiques in particular the dualistic thinking of the American church, which happily embraces and protects the trappings of the world's most profligate society yet glibly

preaches that the material world ultimately does not matter.¹

Unfortunately this mindset has often been carried unwittingly into China, with Christians from outside encouraging Chinese brothers and sisters to do "spiritual" ministry but offering little to equip them for the very real stewardship opportunities facing them every day in their homes, workplaces and communities. While lip service has been given to "reaching influencers," one might ask how much thought has been given to equipping them to exercise this influence in today's China.

Unlike their peasant brothers and sisters of previous decades, today's urban believers find themselves daily confronting issues such as those mentioned at the beginning of this column. As business leaders, educators, officials and professionals in a variety of fields, they are increasingly in a position to steward human and material resources. The decisions they make do have environmental, financial, cultural and ethical implications, not to mention implications for their own families and communities.

Thus, it is refreshing to watch many of them, unhindered by the dualistic thinking of the "Christian" West, as they seek to apply their faith to all areas of life in a way that is seamless and natural. How the church in China continues to practice stewardship into the future bears watching by a global church that is itself in need of rediscovering true stewardship.

Endnote

1. Mark Foreman, *Wholly Jesus: His Surprising Approach to Wholeness and Why it Matters Today*. Boise, Idaho: Ampelon Publishing, 2008, p. 208.

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ChinaSource serves the international faith-based community by identifying critical issues, formulating strategies, convening resources and evaluating results for the promotion of responsible and effective service in China.

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However, China also has the world's worst pollution. In recent years, lists of the 20 cities whose air is most polluted typically contain 16 or 17 cities in China. I experienced that one morning in March 2002 when I left my windowless office in the Tsinghua University School of Law for a short break. Looking outside, I saw a bright orange sky. What I was seeing was dust. Lots and lots of dust. So much dust, in fact, that two days later the United States Environmental Protection Agency reported that the permissible particulate level had been exceeded in Aspen, Colorado because of the millions of dust particles that had been carried from China—and, it was Mao's fault. The grasslands several hundred miles west of Beijing had remained stable for countless generations as local herders grazed livestock on the rich grasses. Then, in the 1950s, Mao Zedong moved thousands of native Chinese to the area to increase agricultural production and to repopulate the region with people more loyal to his regime than the traditionally Mongolian local culture. The orange sky that I saw from my office in Beijing was the predictable result of overgrazing and its resulting desertification.

Water pollution is another crisis. China's fisheries suffered \$130 million in losses from 941 water pollution incidents in 2004 that affected 211,000 hectares of freshwater ecosystems. The quantity of water is often a problem as well as its quality. Efforts to move freshwater to places where it is scarce, such as Beijing, include such controversial projects as the Three Gorges Dam in central China, which many environmentalists believe will destroy many of the nearby ecosystems. Further south, the planned damming of the Mekong River could destroy a lot.

Pollution is not China's only environmental problem. Forests have suffered an especially devastating toll throughout China. Mark Elvin's book about China's environmental history describes "the destruction of the old-growth forests that

once covered the greater part of China" as "the oldest story in China's environmental history." The story unfolded because "the original core of classical Chinese culture was hostile to forests, and saw their removal as the precondition for the creation of a civilized world." Trees were cut for fuel, to provide building materials, and as obstacles to farms and other human projects. However, the disappearance of the forests caused other, albeit predictable, problems. Deforestation increased erosion, which resulted in huge amounts of sediment collecting along the coasts and

records how God created all living things and also describes how God brought order to the world by separating light from darkness, land from water, and the earth from the heavens. The way in which God did all of this is notable in two respects. First, God created the world out of nothing. As the apostle John later wrote, "through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3). Second, God created by his word. The creation story repeatedly describes how God spoke and "it was so" (Gen. 1:7, 9, 11, 15, 24).

2. God pronounced the creation

Christian environmental thinking begins with innumerable biblical texts. Eight themes about God's creation emerge from the Bible's teaching.

the sides of lakes and rivers. Wood became scarce as early as 600 B.C. in some parts of the country. During the twentieth century, China encouraged the wholesale destruction of forests for their timber which was the country's primary fuel until coal recently replaced it, or simply the removal of trees to facilitate agricultural crops. Trees were cut indiscriminately in a planned effort to generate revenue for local education, health and infrastructure needs.

Christians and the Environment

Christian environmental thinking begins with the innumerable biblical texts involving the creation of the earth and all of its creatures, the relationship of the people to their often hostile environment, the rules for treating animals and the land, and the rich imagery contained in the Psalms and other books. Eight themes about God's creation emerge from the Bible's teaching.

1. God created the world. The opening sentence of the Bible states that "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). The balance of the first chapter of Genesis

to be good. When God created each part of creation, he "saw that it was good" (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25).

These statements suggest three interconnected explanations for the goodness of creation: creation is good because God created it; creation is good because God proclaimed that it was so; and creation is intrinsically good as shown by God's response to it. Creation reflects God and it honors God. Today creation suffers the consequences of the entry of sin into the world; thus, the current state of creation does not reflect the original goodness that God saw.

3. God is the owner of all creation.

David wrote that "the earth is the LORD's, and everything in it (Ps. 24:1). The idea of God as the owner of creation pervades the creation account, the Old Testament saga of the people of Israel and the parables that Jesus told in the New Testament. God charges humanity with certain responsibilities for creation, but God's authority and control over his creation supersedes both the creation itself and humanity's role in it.

4. God gave humanity dominion over creation. The most controversial

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The Three-fold Call of the Leader as Steward

R. Scott Rodin

“We are continually tempted to forget that it is not what men do that is the vital matter, but rather what they are. In Jesus Christ neither legal observances nor the omission of legal observances avails anything, ‘but a new creature.’ God is a great deal more concerned about our really being new creatures than about anything else; because he knows that if we are right as to our inward being, we shall certainly do right as to our outward actions. The essential thing, therefore, is character; and doing is valuable only as it is an indication of ‘being.’”

These words from Hannah Whitehall Smith illustrate a foundational principle for the Christian leader; God is more concerned with *who we are* than with *what we do*. Throughout scripture we learn that God seeks first the transformation of our hearts before the transaction of our business.

There is a growing crisis in the leadership of Christian churches in China and the West. It is not a lack of effort, passion, commitment or training. Rather, the crisis lies deeper within the heart and it can be summed up in this way: *We are so driven to “do” the work of God that we neglect the more important process of “be-*

ing” the person God created us to be.

Christian leaders are “doing” themselves to death! Believing that somehow God is pleased with a frenetic pace that leaves us exhausted, we take on more responsibility and shoulder more burdens for our people. We measure our ministry in quantities of people and services, house calls and money, buildings and baptisms. However, the measurement of success in the kingdom of God is radically different. Jesus measures things like our thirst for intimacy with our heavenly Father, our love of ourselves as God created us, the quality of our relationships and our care for his creation.

Matthew records in chapter 16:

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”

The denial of self for the sake of the cross calls us to lose our “doing-driven” life that measures our worth by the accumulation of our accomplishments. Jesus questions the value of a life of doing—“gaining the whole world,” if it costs us

our very being—“losing your own soul.” This is the question of steward leader vs. the owner leader; an internal, transformational focus vs. an external, transactional focus. It is life vs. death, fulfillment vs. burnout, freedom vs. bondage.

In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul writes:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal (1 Corinthians 13:1).

Paul points to the transformation of the heart as the normative and requisite transformation from which all of our acts of love must flow. Cut off from inner transformation, our outward act, our very best “doing” is reduced to “the resounding gong of a clanging cymbal.” It profits us nothing. It is empty and void of meaning.

The **first calling** of the leader as steward is to “be” fully the person God created you to be. It is a life driven by a thirst to know deeper intimacy with God. It is the priority of “being” the godly leader over “doing” the work of leading. Are you “doing-driven”? How do you measure your ministry success? Do you value above all else the work God seeks to do within you?

The second calling involves our work as stewards of our own identity as both beloved children of God and as sinners in need of daily repentance and transformation. Scripture sets up for us a tension in how we are to understand and steward this identity. *I believe that understanding and maintaining this tension is the single most challenging and important component in the life of the steward leader.* Here is what this tension looks like.

On one hand, we are assured that we are beloved children of God. We are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14). We are truly “God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10). Christian leaders are *certain* that their creator is a loving God, *confident* that they have been created as the special workmanship of this loving God and *convinced* that nothing will ever separate

them from the love of their creator God!

We are, on the other hand, the redeemed yet still sinful children of God. For all of the grace and love showered down upon us, we have hearts that are still in need of the ongoing transformation of the Holy Spirit. We still fall back into the old habits and sins of a life that is passing away, yet still so very present. We fight against the flesh and a divided heart. We lament with Paul, “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do; what a wretched man I am, who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:15, 24). We hear him later affirm, “apart from Christ I can do nothing.” It is the same for us. We war against the flesh and fail often.



The first calling of the leader as steward is to “be” fully the person God created you to be.

We live in an almost constant need of grace and forgiveness.

Our identity as effective leaders is found in the very **midst** of this tension. As Christian leaders, we must maintain this tension; otherwise, we will be pulled down either through a shift to self-confidence on the one side, or demoralization on the other. As we lead from the center of this tension in our own lives we are able to lead others to that same place.

It is in the right balance of this tension that we are free to lead. Freedom is not the result of the easing of this tension but just the opposite. We are free when we can embrace both the wonder of our own creation and the depth of our own sin. We are free when we can know genuine humility in our own need for daily repentance and grace and genuine courage in our place in God’s abundant grace and never ending love. We are free to look our sin in the face and not let it overwhelm us. We are free to let God work wondrous and miraculous things in us and through us without ever thinking that it is we alone who are wonderful and miraculous.

The **second calling** of the leader as steward is finding and living in this place of maintained tension where we enjoy the freedom that we have in Christ Jesus.

Finally, the Christian leader recognizes that our time is not our own. We have been given every second of life as a gift to be developed, nourished and cherished. There is no waste in God’s kingdom. Our times of preparation, reflection and waiting are as dear to God and his purposes for us as our times of great accomplishment and productivity. God is the master author, and he is writing our story in all of its dimensions. Every word, every event has meaning, and often the less dramatic moments carry the greatest weight. As a steward of time we know that all of our

work has eternal value.

This is especially true in our specific calling to our ministry. God was at work in our community before we arrived, and he will continue his work long after we leave. For some duration of time we are stewards of this organization and this community. Therefore, we are free in relationship to this calling. We wear our mantle of leadership lightly. Christian leaders must be free to truly be stewards of the people they serve and the organizations they lead. They must reject every temptation to play the owner, and instead they must live and work daily in a freedom with respect to their current position. We need to be committed to serve our churches with our whole heart and also ready and free to leave them to our successors whenever God so leads, *all at the same time*. When we can accomplish both, we will know the freedom of the leader called by God.

What would it mean if we took seriously the value of every second of time? Not with a franticness that measures value only in terms of “doing,” but in a

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Peter Lucinsky

Tough Calls: Indigenous Investing

Gary Russell

The head of a mission agency once wrote me asserting that **Christians outside of China have one and only one role in China missions:** giving money to Chinese Christians. I know other missions that are almost as adamant that outsiders should never, ever, give any money to national Christians, because doing so creates dependence, corrupts relationships and introduces temptation. Money can be a double-edged sword: one side cuts a blessing, the other side a curse! I have seen both in China; in fact, I confess, I have wielded it both ways myself.

Positive Experience

One Chinese friend, a house church leader with broad experience, is in touch with many ministry opportunities where some money would certainly help. He works a lot in poor minority areas. He also knows quite a few foreigners, most of whom could help significantly with minimal inconvenience, much less any sacrifice. In the several years I have known him, he has asked for outside financial help for exactly one project: travel and materials for nationals training Sunday School teachers in several provinces. Nothing else.

He explains why. First, he has seen great damage done by foreign money to Chinese churches. Second, he wants to challenge Chinese to be more generous

to God's work themselves. Third, he ultimately wants this project to be one hundred percent indigenously supported, although that goal is not yet viable.

Should I help? For the last few years, yes, our agency has advocated for this project and annually networked support. Why? Here are my reasons:

- I have known this brother over 10 years.
- He is respected and recommended by other trusted Chinese and experienced foreigners with no vested interest.
- He recognizes the downside of foreign money and lobbies for it only rarely, and never for himself.
- He asks for other kinds of help more often, help that does not involve money.
- He has a fine marriage and family life.

- He consistently manifests the fruit of the Spirit and carries the aroma of having spent time with the Lord.

- The implementers of the project are volunteers, not asking for compensation.

- He answers all questions and gives progress reports that include disappointments.

- Nationals are also supporting the project; he does not ask foreigners to fully fund it.

- The budget is substantial but not huge. (Not multiple six figures, for example.)

- He does not use tear-jerking stories or manipulation.

- I have other collaborating sources affirming the project.

- He welcomes receiving project materials instead of money to purchase them.

- In my opinion, it is a strategic project, replicating, cost-effective and without buildings.

- I met the main implementers and quietly observed their fervency during worship when they thought no one was looking and their willingness as urbanites to suffer rural inconveniences. They have never dropped hints of any other financial needs whatsoever.

This has been a positive experience and, as far as I can determine, fruitful for the Lord. There have been others like it with other national co-workers. However, there have been experiences with the other edge of the sword as well.

Negative Experience

Another national believer was highly recommended to me by more than one credible China mission veteran. I began to spend some time with him, off and on for about a year. He already had a ten year track record of ministry. Now, he began to share his vision to address a major need in the Chinese church. I was interested, and he asked to introduce me to his foreign partner, an American pastor, so they could present their plan together. Everything sounded good to me; plus, I ran it past others I respect and they liked it. A board was formed. Together we raised a substantial amount of dollars.

Now, I regret every penny. After a year or two we began noticing patterns like evading accountability, a troubled family life, disappointing feedback from involved nationals and foreigners, and ever-expanding new “opportunities” requiring more money. We went to considerable lengths to determine the facts, which proved worse than feared. I confronted this believer face-to-face with a respected witness, experienced his dishonesty firsthand and sadly had to personally break fellowship with him completely.

This experience damaged me for at least two years, dissipating motivation and discouraging my personal faith. Far worse, however, is how much more profoundly it must have damaged those we

intended to serve. It was a sobering lesson, and in retrospect I recognized many mistakes.

- Too much depended on trust that was concentrated on just one person.

- Enthusiasm to meet the pressing need ran ahead of patient application of due process.

- Discreet back-door references from key national leaders were not sought at the outset.

- Foreign China veterans with a track-record specializing in the same dimension of ministry were not consulted.

- Early signals of possible problem issues were overlooked rather than pursued.

- Everything boiled down to one

SECOND CORINTHIANS is a **fund-raising** letter soliciting financial donations.

thing: foreign money—and lots of it.

- Expansion outpaced quality control and evaluation.

- The relationship was young and had not been tested over time.

- I was naively overconfident in my “gift of discernment.” Skepticism was minimal.

- The key foreign partner was hardly known at all. He knew little about China and zero about its culture while manifesting some classic traits of Westerners who fail in China. I overlooked this.

- Smooth talk alone was granted the power to persuade because we wanted to believe.

At this stage of the journey, my conclusion is to allow neither apparent successes nor failures to dictate a simplistic, predetermined philosophy to be superimposed on every opportunity. It is so easy to relieve ourselves of the troubling responsibility to wrestle through the ambiguous factors in a given context and instead substitute a more convenient “always or never” policy to make the decision for us.

Scriptural Directives

Are there scriptures that will help?

Second Corinthians is a fund-raising letter soliciting financial donations for brothers and sisters in need in another city, namely Jerusalem. Details of the process for accountability are disclosed.

If we have two cloaks and a brother has none, we are to give one away “that there may be equality.” To tell the truth, it sounds a bit too socialist for my taste, but that is what it says.

In one case (but not all cases) when Jesus sent out traveling evangelists, he instructed them to take no money, not even indigenous Jewish support. Rather, they were to be completely supported by those to whom they ministered.

Looking at these scriptures, we must

ask: Does a broad scriptural study support either an “always” or a “never” policy? In fact, it seems to carefully avoid mandating either.

Questions to Ask

With both positive and negative experiences behind me and considering scriptural examples, I have determined some important questions to ask when considering future opportunities. Here are questions I find helpful.

- How long have we known these people?

- Who else knows them, either Chinese or foreign, and for how long? Do they recommend them?

- Is anyone else already helping support them?

- Would we be “leading them into temptation” with money or creating unrealistic future expectations?

- How can we arrange accountability that is culturally appropriate?

- Should we begin by building a relationship based primarily on money?

- What if the police find out they are getting money from foreigners?

- Will the project be perceived as “ours,” rather than their own? Whose is it?

- Will they feel pressure to invite us to come and minister, even if the danger far outweighs the benefits to them? Will they feel compelled to use “our” material? How will we know these things, realizing that Chinese are too polite to be candid—especially if they think much-needed support is at stake?

- How can the effectiveness of the project be gauged and by whom? What will the process be? Who are the key implementers and what are their qualifications?

- How are key direct participants/beneficiaries selected? If more money were available, would that motivate leaders to select more relatives and friends rather than the most qualified for this “benefit”? (They face great cultural pressure to do just that.)

- If we cannot support all the project venues, what is the best way to allocate support among them? (Foreigners like to “sponsor” specific venues which are then relatively blessed, while others that are not sponsored suffer, making leaders appear unfair.)

- What successive steps will be implemented after the project? Where and why? At what point will they be locally supported?

- Which of these questions are culturally appropriate to ask? When should they be asked, and how? Should they be asked indirectly through someone else (the Chinese way), and if so, who should do this?

A Practical Example

Pastors “Jiang” and “Chang” together lead more than 500 churches that Jiang has planted. However, they also know there are many other places where people have never heard the Word at all. So these churches, dirt poor and barely able to support their own pastors, have begun sending missionaries. Like missionaries in most places, they need to be trained and supported. With their own funds already stretched to the max, Jiang and Chang asked me and a larger ministry I was advising to help support the training.

So, what did we do? First, we learned their history and began to answer some

of the questions above. Then, at a first meeting, we gave them only enough for their expenses in coming to meet us and a very modest amount (a few hundred RMB) to each, to bless them and their own poor families. Why? First of all, our long-time, respected Chinese friends, who had introduced and recommended Jiang and Chang and were present during the entire meeting, recommended doing exactly that. They knew what was best, far better than we did. Secondly, we prayed and felt God’s positive leading to do so. Thirdly, Jiang and Chang themselves agreed we all want a genuine long-term relationship and to start right off by transferring a lot of money would set the wrong tone.

Two months later, we were all back together for a second meeting. In the meantime, we had done some checking, and maybe our Chinese friends had too. We asked more specific questions, prayed and conferred, and at the end of the meeting did give some moderately significant (maybe a thousand \$US) financial support for their training.

Before long, Jiang and Chang asked us to support one of their missionaries who was ready to be sent out. It seemed to me this was too quickly crossing into the next level of financial support—a bad sign. Would this create an unhealthy dependence on foreign money? Could it eventually lead to financial corruption? Might it cause the evangelist to transfer loyalty to us at the expense of his/her Chinese leaders? Would it extend the gospel into unreached areas that are now without Christ? All of the above? Ultimately we declined.

Determining funding is never simple. It would be a lot easier to just give financial support and go away feeling good about it—oblivious to whether good is actually accomplished! But responsible stewardship requires that we prayerfully ask the pertinent questions and follow intentional protocols as well as the Holy Spirit’s leading.

Gary Russell is president of China Harvest, www.servingchina.com, and has been in full-time China ministry since 1990. ■

The Three-fold Call of the Leader as Steward
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more redeemed sense of desiring to invest every second in God-honoring ways.

The **third calling** of the leader as steward is to be free in relationship to time, and also respond to the use of time in joyful obedience. To be free in relationship to time requires a true steward’s perspective. It means to lay aside the fear that comes from the sense that time is slipping away. It means to see the possibilities in the use of time as opportunities to be faithful stewards, to be creative and expressive and redemptive in our investment of this precious gift. To be free means that time does not control us. The clock is not our enemy, aging is not a plague and deadlines do not rule our life. We are free to ask, “How would God have me spend this day, this hour, this lifetime?”

Are you free in your relationship to the time God has given you? Are you obedient to the way God would have you invest that time? That is what it means to nurture the gift of time as a steward leader. As you do, you can lead your people in freedom in their own attitudes toward time.

The crisis Christian leaders are facing must be met with a passionate commitment to value the transformational work of the Holy Spirit within us in these three areas of our calling. It calls us to value our “being” over our “doing.” It requires us to live in a healthy balance as stewards of our self-image. It calls us to be stewards of our time, which means being free to invest our time as God leads and also free to be at peace with respect to time.

Pray daily for a heart that seeks to know God more intimately each day. Pray for balance in your life as a reflection of God’s love for you. Pray for a peaceful and contented relationship to time, and the wisdom to invest it wisely in the work of building God’s kingdom.

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Conserving Water and Wildlife in the Source Areas of China's Major Rivers

J. Marc Foggin

J. Marc Foggin

China is developing at a phenomenal rate, and urbanization may be the most obvious feature of China's human landscape in the 21st century; yet, we must ask the question: *At what price such rapid development?* While the issues may be complex, and often it is difficult to weigh one concern over another, one important ingredient of a balanced response that sometimes is overlooked are the matters of *equity* and *justice*, both within the present time and vis-à-vis future generations. Within the context of the rapid urbanization observed in China, especially since the onset of the *Xibu Dakaifa* (Great Western Development Strategy) in 2000, we must also consider three important realities.

First, urban centres both large and small can only survive, let alone flourish, as long as agricultural production in the surrounding region is sustained (with some allowance made for globalization, which can vastly increase the geographic scope of what may be considered the "surrounding region"). Second, agricultural production in different parts of China has been developed, often over millennia, in ways that generally proved to be best suited to the local ecological conditions, which provide both constraints and opportunities for socio-economic development. (Additionally, agricultural production methods in different parts of China have been developed by different people groups, and culture and livelihood often are tightly intertwined.) Third, all the decisions we make now will certainly affect how we live in the future—for better or for worse. Hence, the necessity to strive for more sustainable practices, that is, good stewardship, in relation to the world's natural resources in order to ensure the well-being of future generations.

China's rivers are its lifelines. Agri-

culture and the physical well-being of its people are dependent on having access to good and reliable water supplies, most of which are fed by the Yellow, Yangtze and Mekong rivers. With the source of all these rivers situated in the heart of the Tibetan Plateau (see Box), no wonder China has turned its gaze to this ecologically important region, seeking to ensure the protection of this vast "water tower" of Asia. Far-reaching government policies have been put in place, much media attention has been given and new protected areas (nature reserves) have been established. However, similar to the first question are others that must be asked: Must the local

traditional livelihood and culture based on natural resources to a sedentary life with few opportunities for alternative employment and with no certain improvements in health or education. The fate of resettlement projects attempted over the past two centuries in Canada and the U.S., also undertaken in the name of development, shows numerous aboriginal people and communities in despair, often lasting for generations. Must this sad, avoidable history be repeated for China to develop? Surely not!

To answer this question, first it must be recognized that urbanization does not always improve people's health (in fact, the opposite may be true), and

The Tibetan plateau is the most prominent feature of Asia, a vast highland that comprises approximately one-quarter of China. Half a dozen major Asian rivers originate in this vast mountainous region, including the Yangtze, Yellow and Mekong rivers, with downstream influence on nearly 40% of the world's human population. Many rare and endangered species are present in this unique environment, as well as a unique way of life, Tibetan nomadic pastoralism, which is well adapted to the environmental conditions present in the high altitude grasslands.



J. Marc Foggin

residents of the Tibetan grassland region be made sedentary, relocated and urbanized in order to protect the environment? Is urbanization really a necessity to achieve the socio-development goals set before us?

In the case of Tibetan herders, a form of animal husbandry with seasonal mobility has been developed over many centuries. This custom is both sustainable and generally productive and well adapted to the climate and other natural conditions of the Tibetan plateau region. Yet, current development policy seeks to move all remaining herders off the grassland into new towns, from a

proximity to schools is not the only measure by which genuine access to appropriate educational opportunities should be assessed. Second, in order to protect the vast grassland and mountainous regions surrounding the source areas of the Yangtze, Yellow and Mekong rivers, it is local Tibetan herders *still living on the land* (and not resettled into towns) that may be our best allies in environmental management and conservation. Their traditional ecological knowledge, supplemented by a dose of modern (formal) education as well as exposure to scientific methodology, can

Continued on page 15

A Good Steward

Job

The year 2008 was an extraordinary year for China as a country. It was also a year of many changes for churches in China. The May 12th earthquake thrust underground Christian churches in China onto the surface, from the sidelines onto center stage. They became sons of light, building a city on a hill that cannot be hidden. In the aftermath of the earthquake, a movement first conceptualized by house churches to connect churches throughout China gave birth to the non-profit organization China's Christians' Love in Action (CCLA).

CCLA has its roots in house churches and has maintained a close relationship with them since inception. From rescue efforts immediately following the earthquake to later reconstruction work, CCLA strives to be both a compassionate aid provider and a bridge that brings government and churches together, legitimizing churches' humanitarian efforts and gaining recognition and support from authorities.

China's churches faced an inevitable question in 2008: How can the church fulfill its social responsibilities and be relevant in the mainstream culture? A church that cannot impact the community or be embraced by society at large is powerless, incapable of fulfilling God's Great Commission. Even as China's house churches were rehearsing for their roles, a historic opportunity presented itself. We must be grateful that China's house churches did not shy back or retreat, but boldly responded to the call.

In this calling, God had bestowed upon China's Christians another responsibility—that of being his stewards. According to his own divine will and the ability of his servants, God distributes his wealth for each Christian to

manage. Each of us can be the servant who received five talents, two talents, or one talent. How much we are entrusted with is God's prerogative; but the key is our faithful management of our talents.

The word faithfulness has two definitions. The first is to guard a property from waste or damage. God himself brought CCLA into existence so no single person or organization can claim ownership or glory. CCLA's only role since its inception is that of a conduit, channeling Christian churches' compassion and funds to affected areas, into the hands of desperate victims, bringing love and hope to the lonely and hopeless. Sustained by churches' financial resources, human resources and fervent prayers, CCLA distributed several million dollars worth of donated goods by immersing itself in the lives of victims. Every penny went to the needy without any trace of waste or fraud.

The second definition of faithfulness is the willingness to take risks on God's behalf, instead of burying that one talent. Those who never take risks do not need faith. Those who do not need faith do not need God, nor want to rely on God. God placed China's churches in the center of his ordained storm. We must stand at the bow and ride out the storm. It is not an easy choice, but one that comes with tough challenges. From a divine perspective, every crisis is an opportunity, for *"all things work together for good for those who love God."* CCLA welcomes the challenge.

Starting June 17, CCLA bucked a longstanding antagonistic relationship between the house church and the government by initiating dialogues with various levels of authorities—from provincial to city to local village—to gain their approval and support. At the same time, CCLA served as a clearinghouse,

collecting donations from house churches throughout China as well as churches and charities from overseas. The effort demanded immense discernment and wisdom, which can only come from the Lord. There were spiritual battles along the way that could only be overcome with unwavering vision, determination and patience. It was through these circumstances that God developed us, growing us into faithful stewards after his own heart. We were able to know him and draw close to him. He is our stronghold, our ever-present help in trouble. As the scope of work expands, so does the risk it presents. Taking risks for God is always worthwhile and has its rewards, for he has promised: *"For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him."*

As God's stewards, faithfulness must be accompanied by goodness, or good character, as well as a sense of self-awareness. Everything is from the Lord and belongs to him. Our job, like Moses', is to faithfully complete what is asked of us. We must never, ever take advantage of our position or hold onto anything in God's house as our own. We also need to have a kingdom mindset and vision because what we are entrusted with is God's business, not to be confused with personal domain or enterprise. China's Christian churches should take great caution against self-pride or self-content, as well as rivalry or contest among ourselves. Only when we each take on God's eyes and heart can we work together despite differences of opinions and gifts. Only then can his Kingdom be enlarged.

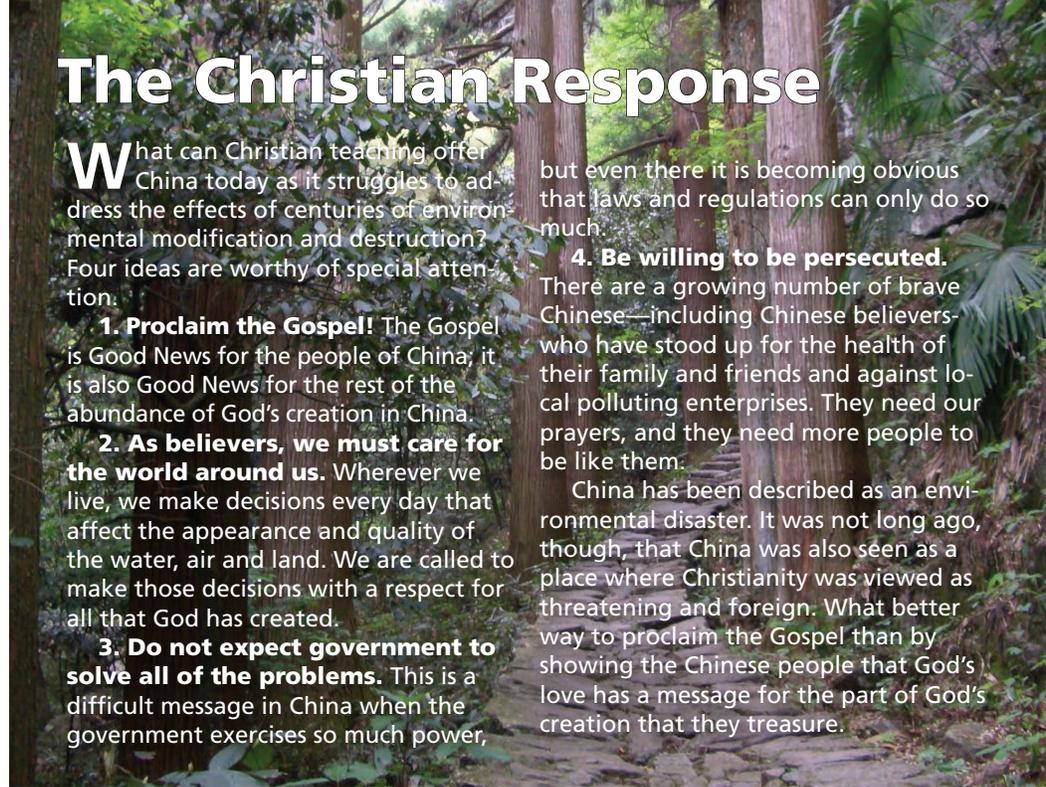
It is of primary importance that we build our life's foundation on the solid rock that is our Lord Christ Jesus. No matter how fast or big China's churches grow, without this vital key all is just withering grass and drifting clouds. All God's servants must be vigilant, for his judgment begins with his own household.

Translation is by Alice Loh. ■

verses in the Bible for environmentalists appear at the end of the first chapter of Genesis where God gives men and women “dominion” over all other creatures and commands humanity to “fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:26, 28). Historically, these commands have been cited to justify actions that treat the provision of resources needed—or wanted—by humanity as the only purpose of creation. Much of recent Christian environmental scholarship questions that understanding. Indeed, the word “dominion” is used elsewhere in the Bible to describe a peaceful, servant rule (Leviticus 25:43; Ezek. 34:4; 1 Kings 4:24). Moreover, God exercises dominion himself, and the examples of God’s rule—and his rule of creation in particular—believe any suggestion that dominion equals exploitation. Three models of dominion, servanthood, kingship and stewardship, support a Christian obligation to actively care for creation.

5. God charged men and women with the responsibility of caring for creation. God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden so that Adam could “tend and keep it” (Gen. 2:15). What it means to “keep” creation is illustrated by the priestly request that “the LORD bless you and keep you” (Num. 6:24) and by God’s placement of an angel at the east of Eden to “guard” the garden after the fall (Gen. 3:24). The obligation to care for creation is further demonstrated by the understanding of the command to exercise “dominion” described above. Conversely, the Bible teaches that God will judge those who injure the earth (Rev. 11:16-18).

6. God alone is worthy of worship. The first commandments that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai were “you shall have no other gods before me,” and “you shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them” (Ex. 20:3-4). The scriptures then recount numerous instances where people violated those commands by worshipping a variety of other



Mel Sletch

The Christian Response

What can Christian teaching offer China today as it struggles to address the effects of centuries of environmental modification and destruction? Four ideas are worthy of special attention.

1. Proclaim the Gospel! The Gospel is Good News for the people of China; it is also Good News for the rest of the abundance of God’s creation in China.

2. As believers, we must care for the world around us. Wherever we live, we make decisions every day that affect the appearance and quality of the water, air and land. We are called to make those decisions with a respect for all that God has created.

3. Do not expect government to solve all of the problems. This is a difficult message in China when the government exercises so much power,

but even there it is becoming obvious that laws and regulations can only do so much.

4. Be willing to be persecuted. There are a growing number of brave Chinese—including Chinese believers—who have stood up for the health of their family and friends and against local polluting enterprises. They need our prayers, and they need more people to be like them.

China has been described as an environmental disaster. It was not long ago, though, that China was also seen as a place where Christianity was viewed as threatening and foreign. What better way to proclaim the Gospel than by showing the Chinese people that God’s love has a message for the part of God’s creation that they treasure.

beings: golden calves, Baal, silver and gold gods, angels, the starry host and unknown gods. In short, people “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles” (Rom. 1:23). The consequences that befell the people who worshiped the creation instead of the creator demonstrate the seriousness with which God takes these commands.

7. Creation has suffered the effects of the entry of sin into the world. The fall of humanity that occurred when Adam and Eve sinned affected the rest of creation, too. The immediate result was God’s curse of the ground so that it produces thorns and thistles requiring much more work to obtain food from the land. The fall also alienated people from other creatures, with later passages describing how God used animals to exercise his judgment against humanity (Lev. 26:22; Num. 21:6; Ezek. 5:17). Animals, plants and the rest of creation suffer because of human actions and because of God’s judgment against human sin.

8. God will redeem his creation. The entire creation is included in many of the covenants that God announces throughout the Bible. For example, God established a covenant with Noah, his descendants and every living creature on

earth that never again would a flood destroy all life on earth (Gen. 9:8-11). In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes that:

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time (Rom. 8:19-22).

Other passages describe how this earth will be destroyed in the day of judgment only to be replaced by a new earth (2 Pet. 3:7, 10; Rev. 21:1).

This is far from an exhaustive list of themes relating to creation that run through the Bible. They give a sense, though, of the premises from which Christians approach environmental issues. To be sure, the details of God’s relationship to creation “past, present and future” have prompted debates between Christian traditions, and they continue to do so. Nonetheless, the biblical account of creation contains abundant instruction for those who seek to fulfill God’s purposes for his creation today.

John Copeland Nagle is the John N. Matthews Professor at Notre Dame Law School. ■

Stewardship in the Business Community

Joshua Lee

When you scan the front page of any major newspaper or news magazine today, you can quickly recognize a plethora of catch phrases that defines today's business paradigm and methodologies. Phrases such as Return on Investment (ROI), operational productivity, de-leveraging, asset allocations, performance management, employee ownership and virtual teams fill the business pages. However, one phrase that is not commonly found in the business vocabulary is "stewardship."

Most people associate "stewardship" with church offerings or a fund-raising

campaign of non-profit organizations. In recent years, "stewardship" also describes the emphasis on environmental protection and green policies. Otherwise, in today's corporations and factories, "stewardship" is seldom mentioned. In reality, every business is in the stewardship business. Businesses are formed for the purpose of harnessing all their available resources to produce substantial value for their stakeholders. These resources include not only financial resources; they also include human resources, finished products, raw and in-process materials, equipment, intellectual properties, relationships with suppliers and customers, manufacturing capabilities, service attitudes as well as management skills.

For example, a local clothing retailer harnesses its available resources of sales associates, store managers, inventory control system, merchandise, store ambiance, store location, pricing strategies, marketing approach, merchandise displays, supplier contracts and customer relationships to deliver maximum value to its stakeholders. For its customers, the store delivers value through a combination of pricing, merchandise and service. For its employees, the store delivers value through salary, medical insurance, job satisfaction and relevant job experiences. For its owners and investors, the store delivers values through

use the talents he has given us to fulfill the plans he has for us. In this parable, the master's expectation was not defined by the amount of revenue increase generated by his servants. Rather, the master's expectation was the wise management and usage of the talents entrusted to the servants. Jesus said, "The one who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more." The emphasis is on the action of the servant—immediate obedience and diligence to manage and utilize the talents—putting them to work to deliver results. The master rewarded the two faithful servants not because of what they achieved; they were rewarded for their obedience to faithfully put their talents to work. The stewardship lessons we learn from the servants are twofold. First, God expects us to faithfully utilize the resources he has entrusted to us. Second, God expects a full accounting of our actions.

In biblical terms, stewardship is acknowledging that everything comes from God, and we must use all that God has given to accomplish all that God desires.

As Christians in the business realm, stewardship not only pertains to how we handle our personal resources, but extends to our work, our companies and all that God has entrusted to us to manage and utilize on his behalf for his glory. In the past few years, business owners, entrepreneurs and white-collar professionals in the urban cities of China are increasingly seeking a faith that will buttress the shifting morality caused by rapid modernization. Therefore, as God turns the hearts of these business leaders toward Christ, they try to integrate biblical teachings into their workplaces and families. These Christian business owners and entrepreneurs strive to understand and apply biblical stewardship principles.

The first step of good Christian stewards requires acknowledging the multitude of resources God has given them for his purposes. Business leaders in China today understand that God has entrusted to them a unique set of

God expects us to faithfully utilize the resources he has entrusted to us, and he expects a **full accounting** of our actions.

Examples of **Creative** Stewardship

Julia Sun* is the owner of a beauty salon and spa. One day she confesses to her business fellowship, "I used to count how much money I made at the end of each day. After I became a Christian, I now count the number of opportunities God gives me to share his Word with my customers." Ms. Sun demonstrates right understanding of the biblical purpose for her business and good stewardship of the business that God has entrusted to her by focusing on God's success criteria instead of her own.

Joshua Wang is the CEO of a multinational company with operations in China. To conserve much needed water, Mr. Wang asked his in-house engineers to design and build a sewage water treatment facility for their factory to recycle their water. The recycled water is given to a local nursery to water their plants. In return, the nursery provides plants for the company's corporate offices. Mr. Wang stewards the resources of his staff and their technologies to reduce their water usage, contribute to sus-

tainable growth, bless the local communities and increase their results beyond water conservation to financial savings and community goodwill.

John Liu is the president of a hospitality and retail group. He needed to restructure a key financial contract with their bank. However, the bank managers came to the meeting seeking kickbacks in return for restructuring the contract. As a Christian, Mr. Liu knew paying kickbacks was unwise stewardship of the God-given resources of finances, spiritual truths and biblical witness. He declined to give any kickbacks and persisted in the negotiations until he and the bank came to mutually agreeable terms without any bribes or kickbacks. At the celebration dinner, one of the bankers asked Mr. Liu why he adamantly refused to pay any kickbacks or bribes. Mr. Liu shared his faith and explained why he relies on the God who provides everything. By wisely managing the talents, biblical values, finances, influence and moral authority, Mr. Liu uses these resources to honor God and to testify of him to others while saving his company precious funds and demonstrating value-based leadership to the local community.

Stetson Wu owns a small business that employs 25 local staff. As

a Christian, he was concerned for his employees and wanted them to learn about Jesus and his gift of new life. Mr. Wu decided to sponsor a weekly class at his office where his staff can learn and study the Word. He asked a local pastor to teach the weekly class, arranged his staff schedule so everyone was available during the class time and set aside office space. He encouraged his staff to attend each meeting. Within weeks of starting this class, several employees accepted the gift of new life and became believers in Jesus. Mr. Wu has continued to sponsor the class and prays that the remaining employees will all embrace Jesus as their own. Mr. Wu uses his resources of influence, time, physical property, relationships and biblical truths to maximize glory for God's name and yield fruit many times his own.

David Jiang owns a local hotel with over 250 rooms. On an overseas trip, he experienced firsthand the impact of the Gideon ministry that places a Bible in every hotel room. Upon returning to his city and his hotel, Mr. Jiang decided to invest his own funds to buy Bibles so they can be placed in each hotel room. This action demonstrates that Mr. Jiang understands God has given him the hotel, his funds and his guests. He obeys God's call to be a steward of these resources (finances, influence, positional authority and physical property) to maximize glory to God and blessings to the local community.

resources that includes their talents, skills, finances, products, services, relationships, opportunities, spiritual truths and personal influence. Next, they recognize that as God, in Genesis 12, blessed Abraham to be a blessing to the nations and peoples, God has likewise blessed them so they can bless the local church, the local community and the business culture. Consider the above examples of creative and steadfast ways that Christians exercise their stewardship responsibilities in the business community. In each of these situations, stewardship led to greater

glory and praise for God and directed blessings toward the local community.

In China, the concept of stewardship is not commonly discussed in business seminars and business fellowships. Chinese Christian business leaders work daily in a culture that does not value biblical principles and face growing economic and market pressure to conform to the prevailing business culture. Admittedly, good stewards in the business community are still an exception instead of the norm. However, God has other ideas. These examples give us a glimpse into the possibilities.

In the past few years, God has been raising up groups of committed believers in cities across China who are daring to imagine God's plan for their businesses and to invest their resources in actions and initiatives that will maximize glory for his name while extending blessings to their local community. One day, as the Lord leads, the exception will become the norm.

*All names have been changed to protect identities.

Joshua Lee has been involved in China service for over seven years. ■

True Stewardship

Stewards in the Kingdom: A Theology of Life in All Its Fullness by R. Scott Rodin. InterVarsity Press, 2000, 222 pages; ISBN-10: 0-8308-1576-7; ISBN-13: 978-0830815760. \$20 at Amazon.com

Reviewed by Kerry Schottelkorb

A few years back I was invited to present a fund development seminar attended by several leaders of like-minded organizations.

I began by asking the “Why have you come?” and “What are your hopes for our time together?” questions. The immediate and aggressive responses startled me. The majority of people said they needed new sources for funds. “Please give us some major donor names,” was the cry of the hour.

Once I had gathered myself I replied, “This has got to be the ultimate in cutting to the chase!” Needless to say, what I had prepared did not come close to fulfilling expectations.

I can relate to the pressure those leaders felt that day. It is so easy and tempting to bypass the essentials in the name of our “good kingdom efforts.”

Having been asked to review R. Scott Rodin’s book, *Stewards in the Kingdom*, I must admit I found myself scanning the “Table of Contents,” seeking to cut to the application chase—to find some choice stewardship/fund development nuggets! Finally, I settled in for the whole ride when, almost immediately, Dr. Rodin proclaims that our addiction to the expedient, the utilitarian, to cutting to the chase for stewardship solutions that work (meaning they bring in much needed money to our ministries), has resulted in a loss of a clear theological definition and passion for genuine stewardship. He establishes at the outset that while “there have

been countless books written which focus on the practice of stewardship producing resources for understanding what stewardship looks like, we have failed to raise up stewards.”

As a theologian with fifteen years of professional fund-raising experience, Dr. Rodin points out “the history of the church’s handling of issues regarding stewardship is laden with false starts” and so he moves us “from the who question of theology to the how question of Christians’ ethics and discipleship” while pointing out the resulting carnage wherever these questions are switched.

Dr. Rodin calls us to “return the concept of the godly steward to the daily vocabulary of Christian life and worship. The purpose of this book is to start us in this direction by providing us

DR. RODIN CALLS US to “return the concept of the **godly steward** to the daily vocabulary of Christian life and worship.”

with a theology of the steward.” The second, “equally compelling reason for this study is that the Christian life is to stand out in the world marked by the attributes of peace, purpose, wholeness, fruitfulness and joy.” Dr. Rodin contends that “the loss of a theology of the steward has not only damaged our ministries, it has robbed us of the rich, full and fruitful life God intends for us.”

So, finally it dawned on me that this book is not first a study on Christian stewardship or fund development. “The thesis of this book is that by reclaiming

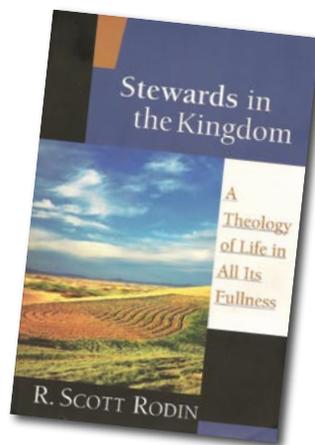
the central motif of the steward, and building it on a sound theological and biblical base, we will be freed and empowered to live as joyous children in the kingdom of God.... That is the life for which Christ died. That is the life that will shine like a light city on a hill, drawing to it all who are lost. That is the life lived by stewards in the kingdom of the triune God of grace.”

Remember, Dr. Rodin said we must first address the who question of theology and only then may we move to the what or ethics question. Throughout the book, Dr. Rodin uses the phrase “stewards in the kingdom of the triune God of grace.” However, he tells us we must read this phrase backwards.

“We know we are called to be stewards, but we cannot begin at this call. By definition, a steward is under the command of one who owns the resources that are to be stewarded. Steward is a title of a servant, one hired to undertake this activity on behalf of the owner. Therefore, we must move the ethical questions back one step and ask, ‘Whose stewards are we? To whom do

we owe allegiance in our work?’”

Dr. Rodin starts by offering “a Christ-centric epistemology—a Christ-centered way of knowing as the only possible starting point for Christian ethics.” He moves from there to an understanding of the triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is crucial because “a thoroughly trinitarian doctrine of creation informs our self-understanding as creatures of a wholly relational God. Therefore, the call to be a steward is also a call that comes from the Father through the Son and in the Spirit.”



Every part of the relationship the triune God calls us into is grace related—even our repentance! However, we are reminded that our calling as children of God in Christ is to be caretakers of this precious gift, even though it is a gift of grace. We did not initiate the relationship, but we are called to steward it.

The fallen reality of the sinful steward is that every day we live out our “sordid solidarity with Adam” as we rebel against God, break with our neighbor, exploit the creation and sin against ourselves.

However, called by the Father through Jesus the Faithful Steward and led by his Spirit, we are invited into a life of worship. “Worship, defined as the free and joyous response to the grace of God toward us in Christ Jesus, is the center of the life of the steward.”

By definition, a theology of the steward means we are kingdom people. We are stewards in the kingdom of God. However, because his kingdom is “both now and not yet” we very easily fall back into positions of ownership, power and control. We hoard, consume, dominate and exploit.

In chapter 6, “The Myth of the Two Kingdoms,” Dr. Rodin addresses the insidious dynamic of a two kingdom mentality, resulting in a “distortion of our relationship to God, to our neighbor, to ourselves and to God’s creation. This latent sin permeates the church and threatens our witness as stewards in the kingdom of the triune God of grace.”

In chapter 7, “The One Kingdom of the Steward,” we rejoice in the wondrous fact that “our lives are not marked by the same boundaries as the world—a life-to-death understanding. We live in a transformed reality—our existence in God’s kingdom; our reality is not marked by birth behind us and death ahead of us, but as children of God our lives are marked by death behind us and only life ahead!” This reality is the key to our living freely, purposefully and fruitfully as God’s kingdom stewards.

Dr. Rodin powerfully states that the “call to be a steward in the kingdom of God is all about death. Before it is about

giving, sharing and investing, it is about death. The fact that we do not hear much about death in the church’s teaching on stewardship may point us to why such teaching has been so ineffectual.”

Our death responses—renunciation of any area of our lives where we remain lords—are simply responses to what Jesus has already done for us. Once we have died in Christ we are free to live: “free from” the baggage of the world’s kingdom and “freedom for” service to God, true love of self, service to our neighbor and healthy stewarding of the creation. The godly steward is daily being called to engage and choose for “one-kingdom living” as God’s worshiper.

In the final two chapters, Dr. Rodin is ready to talk about stewardship. We conclude with a look at the role of the church and the family as the steward and training ground for the nurture and growth of stewards and then a final focus on the ministry of fundraising. For those of you who might be a lot like me, do not even try delving into those last two chapters first. They will not make any sense to you without the foundation of the first seven!

I came away from this book deeply humbled and shaken frankly. I feel the need to re-read and give more time to the profound truths and life application Dr. Rodin offers in the light of scripture. I also have great hope that we will take a much closer look at the foundational biblical truths and dynamics related to the steward in the kingdom.

In the dedication of his book, Dr. Rodin writes: “I pray that this book will be a blessing to pastors, lay leaders, Christian fund-raisers, parachurch ministry leaders and Christian schools, college and seminary faculty, students and leadership. You were in my thoughts and prayers as I wrote.”

It was obvious!

Kerry Schottelkorb and his wife Debra lead an organization called *Bridge Lives*, which is committed to building and linking like-minded leaders, teams and organizations in Asia. ■

Conserving Water and Wildlife Continued from page 9

serve well the country’s goal of protecting the integrity and good functioning of these fragile ecosystems that regulate the flow of rivers. Indeed, there are millions of people downstream who may benefit.

While the future remains uncertain, there is at least some hope. China does seek to integrate environmental concerns into its development planning process. At least in theory, it seeks to improve the well-being of all its different peoples. Unfortunately, there also remains a strong underlying belief that “urban” is always better than “rural,” and this may lead to some of the social challenges briefly alluded to above, especially for Tibetan herding communities.

For over ten years, though, more and more of these communities have been contributing to national conservation goals through wildlife monitoring and anti-poaching patrols, thus helping to protect endangered species. These important activities have been supported by several non-profit organizations, including Plateau Perspectives, and now they also are encompassed within the official work plan of the Sanjiangyuan National Nature Reserve which covers an area larger than the State of New York. Thus, there is some hope that the long-term positive contributions that local herders can make, indeed are making, may be noted at higher levels. If so, then perhaps more choice will be given to local communities in the future, and greater participation will be achieved in decision-making processes surrounding critical conservation/development agendas. If this could be achieved, it would constitute a significant step toward more equitable development and toward a just future—an example of social justice attained in concert with good environmental stewardship.

Marc Foggini, Ph.D., is an ecologist who has worked in China for 15 years. He is the founding director of Plateau Perspectives. For more information go to: www.plateauperspectives.org. ■

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