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# ChinaSource Quarterly

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*Leadership Ethics*

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Guest Editors

華源協作  
CHINASOURCE





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## Editorial

### Witnessing Christ through Ethical Leadership

By Mary Li Ma and LI Jin

The mission of God's people is to witness to the truth, justice, and love of Jesus Christ in their local context. When church leaders practice things contrary to these principles, their witness risks becoming scandalous. Over the past two years or so, we have seen examples in the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements among Western churches. As one article in this issue quotes, *"A good use of power always reflects Christ-likeness, while a misuse or abuse of power bears the name of Christ but not his likeness."*\* This summer issue of *ChinaSource Quarterly* focuses on the topic of leadership ethics among the growing churches in China. A few thoughtful Chinese Christians share their observations.



Researcher, Mary Li Ma, notes that the readership of media content on spiritual abuse within the church has been on the rise, showing the evident relevance of this topic. She addresses why this side of reality should not be neglected, even during a more restrictive phase for churches in China. Ma also addresses the common causes of power abuse in this local context, including communicative, demographic, political, cultural, and theological factors. Towards the end of her article, she provides ethical principles for church leaders and foreign Christian workers.

New media ministry leader, Jerry An, discusses the lessons of leadership failure in Western churches. He challenges Chinese church leaders to walk the extra, needed miles beyond the existing models of leadership, either focusing on "influencing" the upstream or "serving" the downstream. Such strategies are idealistic and do not always work consistently. As leaders immersed in a very authoritarian culture, Chinese pastors need a more sober view of themselves.

Witnessing Christ in communist China may be cross-cultural, but few people can resist the temptation to eagerly swim with the tide of gaining "Christian influence" through means provided by secular society. "The renewal of individual life and collective culture is a slow process; it needs patience and humility." Jerry An points out that Christian character is best revealed "by how we face 'our badness.'" In the end, he reckons that the rise of a new media and technological environment may become even more challenging to paternalistic leadership.

With regard to the formation of governance structures (institutionalization 建制化), LI Jin reviews how Western churches and their counterparts in China traveled contrary trajectories. While the Western church has outgrown its institutionalized phase, churches in China are just beginning to rebuild their structures of governance. Although churches in China embrace institutionalization as a new and promising thing for expansion of Christian influence, LI cautions against its potential risks. He also observes that the post-Christendom West may have projected its hope for Christian influence on churches in China where some leaders interpret the role of the church as being in a pre-Christian Rome. However, the hunger for influence may breed the abuse of power when churches have few accountability structures. In the end, LI also discusses emerging theological confusion in the area of ecclesiology.

In his article, Sam Ren dissects a particular phenomenon in Chinese churches which he calls "spiritualized political correctness." A case study is given as an example to show how this internal cultural norm plays out in the church. Ren then analyzes three causes of this "strong form of legalism": (1) long-term marginalization of churches in China; (2) low-cost maintenance of the Christian faith; (3) a need for certainty as a way to cope with rising uncertainty and changes in Chinese society. The result is an assembly-line type of Christianity ripe with opportunities for abuse of power by pastors.

Pastor Jeshurun Lin wrote a review of the historical novel, *The Apostates*, by Christian writer, Shi Wei. The novel is based on events around the Watchman Nee controversies during the 1950s in China. The ChinaSource team translated and summarized the book review providing an overview of how the story unfolds. The review includes Lin's own reflections on the role of a pastor and the dangers of power abuse.

Last, but not least, ChinaSource president, Kerry Schottelkorb, writes about the need for leaders to walk in the light. He reflects on how a pastor's identity is often caught between "doing" things for God and "being" his humble follower. Church leaders ought to stay vigilant about the temptation of spiritual pride lest it turn their witness against them before God.

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## The Church's Greatest Crisis Comes from Inside

By Mary Li Ma

As we consider the church in China today, we might ask the question: “What are the issues and characteristics that currently define it?” Certainly, the persecution narrative has been a dominant consideration. Second is the narrative of a church that is persevering yet experiencing revival. However, if we are honest, other realities must be addressed. The abuse of power and lack of pastoral ethics can be ranked among the top issues given the overall authoritarian political culture in which many churches are immersed. We also need to acknowledge that during the past two decades, churches in China have enjoyed relative freedom to grow and expand. With expansion, the use of power often becomes a problem. In this issue of *ChinaSource Quarterly*, we delve into these ongoing but often neglected realities. Even with tightened control from the government, the church's greatest crisis does not come from the outside; it comes from the inside.



*Territory* (境界) is a new Chinese-language media ministry founded by a Christian couple who were formerly journalists in China. Since 2018, *Territory* has been publishing a series of articles (in Chinese) on pastoral power abuse on its WeChat public channel. Each article had a readership of 10,000 to 30,000 showing that this topic is certainly a felt need among Chinese believers. Below are a few examples of the articles.

- [被忽视的属灵虐待](#), “The Neglected Reality of Spiritual Abuse”
- [基督教“咪吐”峰会：直接原谅施虐者并非治愈的捷径](#), “Christian #MeToo Summit: When Forgiving Abusers Is Not Healing”
- [假属灵权柄带来的危害，有谁知道？](#) “Does Anyone Know the Harm of False Spiritual Authority?”
- [有毒的信仰体系是如何炼成的？](#) “How Did a Toxic Spiritual System Form?”
- [“宗教上瘾”：你所不知道的“有毒信仰”](#) “Addicted to Religion: A Toxic Faith You Don’t Know”
- [领袖的结局比开始更重要 ——看美国名牧海波斯退休前被指控](#), “How Leaders End Matters More Than Their Beginnings: Lessons to Learn from Bill Hybels”<sup>1</sup>

Can Christian leaders be religious but become unethical? Very possibly. Both scripture itself and church history fully document such examples. Today's news about power abuse in Western churches (sexual abuse of vulnerable women and minors being the worst) also testifies to the continuation of evil inside the church. However, when it comes to churches in China, which are often portrayed as having been persecuted and then experiencing revival, Western Christians' perceptions can be romanticized into thinking that Chinese church leaders are holier than others. Unfortunately, that is not true.

With sustained numerical growth of the Christian population in China and with increased resources at the disposal of Christian leaders, the church inevitably faces the problem of how to resist the temptation of power abuse. It is the next reality in any growing Christian population. External persecution may scatter the church, but it is often internal power abuse that discredits the witness of the church.

Power structures exist in the church because local houses of God on this earth are also partly human institutions. In fact, it is especially in the church that a range of leadership gifts are endowed with overlapping layers of power: hierarchical power, theological power, emotional power, and spiritual power. Most Chinese church leaders, as first generation believers, have not had long-term mentors; often accountability and ethical boundaries in leadership do not come naturally. Consider a few real life scenarios.

*Case 1:* A few Christian artists started a Bible study and invited a preacher to lead them. In a few years, when the church grew to a certain size and the group diversified to include other professions, the minister preached from the pulpit depreciating art as “secular and meaningless.” Evangelism was preached to be the only meaningful thing. The group of artists who helped found the church became marginalized and malnourished spiritually.

*Case 2:* A sister with hearing and walking disabilities struggled in attending the all-day Sunday service at her church. Her occasional absences led church leaders to visit her at home demanding that she conform to the church's all-day worship routine. This brought more anxiety to her. With more visitations came more accusations from fellow believers that she was not a real Christian. When she responded to this claim, the pastor responded that the church has the right to tell who is a real believer.

*Case 3:* Wang (male) and Zhao (female) have been dating for three years. They went to the pastor for pre-marital counseling. The pastor asked if both of them were born-again. Wang was not certain. Towards the end of the counseling sessions, the pastor told Zhao that since he still did not observe signs in Wang of spiritual rebirth, the two of them should break up with one another.

*Case 4:* A married couple at church lost their 13-year-old son in a car accident. The church held a memorial service as a public witness to participating unbelievers about the Christian faith. The atmosphere was one of joyful triumph over death and celebration. The bereaved parents were not given time to grieve. Soon afterwards, church leaders encouraged the couple to give their lives as full-time missionaries sent out by the church.

These are four true stories from mainland Chinese churches. These ministers are well-trained, some with seminary degrees from overseas. They also labor diligently among the flock, trying to be faithful to their calling. However, none realized how their own misuse of pastoral power could bring spiritual trauma to these church members.

What are the common causes of power abuse within churches in mainland China? The power dynamics between leaders and members of the Chinese church are not well-discussed. The beginning of power abuse by church leaders can be very subtle. Usually it starts with conversations; however, dialogue between a church member and a minister, if the latter lacks sensitivity to his/her own sinfulness, has a different dynamic than a conversation between two peers. When a minister assumes a tone of authority rather than using a give-and-take dialogue, his/her advice may risk becoming domineering and even manipulative. It may strike the member that the minister was being honest and direct, but he/she may have abused their power.

In some cases, certain theological understandings may contribute to the pastoral practices. For example, some biblical counseling training has, at its core, an introspective pattern of spiritualizing all behavioral problems as due to one's own sin. For example, church members who experience depression and other mental illnesses are told by their ministers (or sometimes ministers' wives) to repent of their sinful self-centeredness.

Generally speaking, this need for pastoral ethics has a demographic root; being first-generation believers, these ministers themselves have never been cared for and mentored properly. They tend to adopt a narrow, "spiritualized" outlook on living the Christian life. So, it is easier to supply believers with a quick answer ("all is because of your sin"). Even if some ministers are sensitive to those members who make themselves vulnerable by sharing their problems, the scale of needs among congregants is simply overwhelming. Ministers are typically very overworked. Many find "it is your own rebellion against God" (that can't be wrong) convenient advice for a wide range of problems among their congregants. That way they do not need to listen strenuously and walk alongside someone—which requires so much more work and does not always guarantee an encouraging outcome.

Gender ratio also shapes power dynamics within a local Chinese church. In mainland China, women make up the Protestant majority (60 to 80 percent). Before the 2000s, female leadership was the norm. However, with the introduction of male-dominated theology and the conversion of male members who became leaders, churches now tend to elevate male headship, teach a complementary relationship between the two genders, and discourage females from leading. In some churches, mothers with children under age six are encouraged to give up their careers and stay home with their children; women with professional careers are viewed as pursuing secular values. Women are taught to be submissive, not just to men in marriage, but to all male leaders in the church.

What are other common causes of power abuse within the Chinese church? Besides evident problems such as lack of transparency and accountability, there are a few less discussed cultural and theological causes.

- In China, where Christianity has been politically and legally marginalized, church leaders' pastoral identity may be shaped by a sense of cultural inferiority but spiritual superiority; ministers' own insecurities (theological deficiency or anxiety over their calling) may lead to over-spiritualized identities.
- For a long time, the need for ecclesiology (doctrine of the church) has been filled with rigid versions that elevate the visible, institutional church to an almost supreme level, adding power to leaders' spiritual authority (local versions of the "infallibility of church presbyters").
- Cultural collectivism breeds over-conformity to the leading, visionary pastor who is often elevated to be cognizant of God's will.
- A sense of spiritual hierarchy may exist between church officers and ordinary members.
- Elevation of special grace over common grace may lead to a cognitive, separatist chasm about the world which breeds narrow over-spiritualizing.

On the other end of the causal spectrum lies the Chinese political culture which is highly infested with the worship of positional

power. Immersed in this broader cultural current, positions of authority (pastors and elders) within the church can also be affected. On the way to a healthy pastoral identity, there are many hidden snares and traps. In a strange way, the humble sense of being called by God into ministry can sometimes morph into a spiritualized self-importance or realization of self-centered ambitions.

All of this is not difficult to understand—and the solution is easily identified too: Christian humility and authentic care for the other person. Nevertheless, in practice, these are difficult goals for church leaders to achieve. A typical story goes that a person in need was told by a pastor that he/she was less spiritual (or that his/her spirituality was defective). That individual's spiritual dignity as a child of God had been devalued.

In response to these problems, what should be some ethical principles for church leaders?

- Ministers/leaders should respect the spiritual dignity of individual members because they are God's image-bearers and beloved ones; at the same time, ministers/leaders should be reminded that their role is to walk alongside believers, not to lord over them.
- Ministers should notice the emotional and spiritual vulnerability of church members when they seek pastoral care; they should also be aware of the endowed power in their pastoral role.
- They should apply the Golden Rule: Do unto others what you desire for yourself. In fact, they should practice genuine Christian love for fellow believers as commanded by God in John 13:34.
- They need to embrace a deep conviction of God's providence in the details of daily living, not a truncated view separating special grace and common grace.

How could foreign Christian workers mentor Chinese leaders towards ethical maturity? Westerners, who come and serve in China, need to know that there is always a power dynamic within a local church group. To gain a more sensitive understanding, one needs to humbly listen to all sides. One also needs to appreciate the vulnerability and trust of members when issues of concern are brought up. The most unfortunate case happens when a Western worker, poorly equipped in ethical understandings, comes and forms an alliance with local church leaders who practice poor ethical boundaries.

The examples of leadership scandals (such as Bill Hybels of Willow Creek church) teach us about the danger of a type of "Christian influential-ism," the proposition of grandiose visions of seeking Christian influence in society. Church leaders want media spotlight on their ministry in order to magnify the influence of Christianity. Our modern mass media culture has shaped such desires. Often such visions are later proven to be illusions in reality. As theologian Jacques Ellul critiques in *The Subversion of Christianity*:

Christians and the church have wanted an alliance with everything that represents power in the world. In reality this rests on the conviction that thanks to the power of the Holy Spirit the powers of this world have been vanquished and set in service of the gospel, the church, and mission. ... But what happens is the exact opposite. The church and mission are perpetrated by the power and completely turned aside from their truth by the corruption of power. When Jesus says that his kingdom is not of this world, he says clearly what he intends to say.<sup>2</sup>

As Christ-followers, we should not wince in challenging the evil of a society, but when it comes to the lack of integrity within the church, we also should not resort to double standards. Most important of all, our use of power should reflect Christ. Christian psychologist Diane Langberg gives a sobering summary about why the church should care about power abuse: "A good use of power always reflects Christ-likeness, while a misuse or abuse of power bears the name of Christ but not His likeness."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's Note: The online automatic translations for Hybels and Willow Creek Community Church are not accurate. "Hebos, Haipos, and Hcibosi" are all used for Hybels and "Liuxi" is sometimes used for Willow Creek Community Church.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity* (Wipf and Stock Publishing, 2001), p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Diane Langberg, "Power, Deception, and the Church," a plenary speech at the American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC) National Conference, Dallas, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ncii2Hf3ouQ>

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## Beyond Courageous Leadership and Servant Leadership: What Does Leadership Failure in the West Teach the Chinese Church?

By Jerry An

In Pastor Bill Hybels' seminal work *Courageous Leadership*, he states that a complete leader should not only develop his spiritual gift "downwards" (to lead those below) but also "sideways," to impact one's peers. Furthermore, one should learn how to cultivate one's gifts "upwards" to influence those in higher positions in order to gain better resources and bring on board those with wider influence.

Pastor Hybels has, himself, trodden this road. Under his "courageous leadership," Willow Creek Community Church not only grew quickly; it also served the community and initiated the Global Leadership Summit. The Global Leadership Summit takes "effective administration and strong leadership" as its specialty, attracting numerous people with international influence to share their experiences and network together. Using media and localized organizations for promotion, this summit has not only attained a name but has become a global leadership summit—a platform with important and proactive influence in the church, in society, for government, for careers, and for personal growth.

This platform, which is situated above denominations and religions, is Willow Creek Community Church's greatest outreach activity and also a promotion of its brand; it has won the church a great reputation. In mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and so on, the world of Chinese churches has also been impacted. A great many churches seek to learn from Willow Creek. Willow Creek Community Church is often given awards for best workplace<sup>1</sup> and best employer, which shows its institution, management mechanisms, and professional culture are distinguished. If one compared many churches and organizations—whether in America or among the Chinese—on the level of management, I believe Willow Creek Community Church would be found to be excellent, if not the best.

Another mark of leadership is how this church responds to the challenges of the present day. From the 1970s onwards, Willow Creek Community Church has stood in opposition to the impression held by people of that era that the traditional church is "preachy," "boring," and "all about people donating money." It has stratified itself to treat people depending on their degree of faith, focusing particularly on "seekers" and newcomers, offering them an altogether new and cozy "theatrical experience." Even in its understanding of "expectations for members" and "service," there is great opposition to the "modus operandi" of the traditional church and to any renewal of it. In all areas, churches of the present day, great or small, directly or indirectly, have been influenced by this way of thinking.

Because of the above mentioned excellence of Willow Creek Community Church, people are extremely grieved by Hybels' sexual assault scandal and Willow Creek Community Church's failures in dealing with his case. It has caused them to deeply ponder the matter.

During the past twelve years, the churches of mainland China have gradually become more visible. With each passing day they have become more open-minded and more middle-class. Christians and churches hope for society's approval, acceptance, and affirmation. They also hope to greatly influence society. Willow Creek Community Church has, therefore, become a model and an encouragement to the Chinese church. Seen from another perspective, Hybels' strong leadership style has made the Chinese church, already accustomed to paternalistic leaders, want to emulate him as China's churches are still universally accustomed to, and even worship, authority and authoritarian leaders.

At more or less the same time, the principle of "servant leadership" has also been introduced to China's churches and become a subject of study. If one can say courageous leadership is "upwards-oriented," then servant leadership is "downwards-oriented." Its core idea is that the leader should be a servant, wholeheartedly serving those being led, caring for their needs, resolving their difficulties, expending utmost strength to satisfy their requests and thereby bringing about the goals of the whole body.

However, the fact that "servant leadership" in Western society, and particularly in America, can succeed in pushing itself forward stems from its own cultural "soil" and context. It is not simply a kind of "spirit," but also a system and culture. However, in an Asian society with a culture of authoritarian leaders, servant leadership easily degenerates into a mere slogan or item of propaganda. It is difficult to really put into practice. It can even be taken as a method of control. Or people can use "servanthood" as a pathway to leadership. Servant leaders also become "servant leaders with Chinese characteristics" with all the "selflessness" of a master in servant's clothing.

Apart from cultural differences and the various aspects of the way society has developed, I personally think that this situation arises because the principles of "servant leadership" are actually more a kind of attitude or aspiration. If one wishes to be a leader with a "servant attitude," one must prepare by developing a rigorous motivation to study and a resolution to change. One must train for and practice a servant attitude, create a nurturing and fitting culture for this, imperceptibly change, and finally become a person



with distinctive servant leadership characteristics and life. This is a relatively inward-facing “cultivation of moral character” that is difficult to quantify. In that sense, it is rather idealistic.

The greatest challenge in being a leader is that with increasing experience and maturity of character comes an increased spread of influence and esteem from those around. Gradually, this renders individuals unable to form a sober view of themselves and causes them to develop an overly-high view of themselves. If you feel that you are able to resist temptation, you may put yourself into inappropriate situations. When you think you are able to solve difficult problems, you may allow problems to escalate until they become serious. When you think you are strong, you may use your influence to cover up mistakes. Individuals are like this; churches are also like this—even when there is spiritual maturity and organizational excellence.

People need to thoroughly accept this truth: we are all sinners; furthermore, churches are gatherings of sinners. In China, the traditional political culture and societal restrictions frequently influence us in ways that exceed our self-knowledge and expectations. The renewal of individual life and collective culture is a slow process. It needs patience and humility. As far as the general life of Chinese Christians and the Christian culture of China’s churches are concerned (and both are shallow), this is even more so.

Again, we need to be clear that the “good and bad” of Christians and churches are not prevaricated on “our goodness,” but conversely, are always revealed by how we face “our badness.” No matter whether it is courageous leadership or servant leadership, true bravery is facing one’s own weaknesses. True servants are deeply aware of their own unconscionable flaws.

In line with this comes taking the initiative to establish one’s own system of accountability, fostering a culture of equality and fairness, humbly accepting and even welcoming outside scrutiny, and bravely shouldering responsibility for the outcomes of this course of action. For Chinese society, “shutting authority in the cage” is a fresh, new concept, seldom seen. For the Chinese church, this is also true. Particularly nowadays, China’s churches are approaching a time of increased coercion and pressure. In the normal course of things, this will mean churches’ activities will be more hidden. It will be easy for them to lack supervision. Congregations will feel drawn to strong and courageous-style leaders. Church leaders need to expend even more effort and thought into making breakthroughs and changes in the areas of accountability, transparency, and humility.

During the past few years, the government has been strongly pushing the “Five Improvements and Five Changes” to mark the “Sinification of Christianity” movement. In addition, the new Religious Bureau regulations have placed the responsibility for regulating religious activities at a base level, such as neighborhood committees. Most recently, in Guangzhou, rewards for reporting “illegal religious activities” have been handed out. These “persecutions” make it essential for churches to urgently advance the grounding of Christianity in Chinese culture, becoming rooted in society, and wisely working out their relationships with their “neighbors.” Willow Creek Community Church is a classic example of a “community church”; from it, China’s churches can learn how to serve their communities better.

Today, we find ourselves in an era that is being transformed by a fourth industrial revolution. New media, artificial intelligence (AI), genetic programming, and so on are developing quickly, and have already reached a critical breakthrough point. The extensive use of 5G,<sup>2</sup> AI, and so on will, in the foreseeable future, not only change how people communicate but also how people live, think, and perceive the world. They will also massively impact, even to the point of capsizing, the church and evangelism, theology, and ethics. Facing these cultural changes, the greatest temptation for church leaders is to insulate their members from society by brainwashing them with separatist ideals.

One thing we can be certain of is that if we wish to see an effective response to these challenges, a paternalistic-style leadership is unsuitable. “Paternalistic leaders with servant attitudes” are also not enough. Even servant leadership is not satisfactory. On this point, China’s churches need to engage in more exploration and creativity. If we can say that the government’s duty is, in essence, to restrain evil and promote goodness, then the duty of leadership is to “do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). Only in this way can one become a “faithful,” “good,” and “shrewd” leader.

*Translation is by ChinaSource.*

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<sup>1</sup> *Best Christian Workplaces Institute*, Certified Best Christian Workplaces - U.S. 2018, <http://www.bcwinstitute.com/bcwwlists.html>

<sup>2</sup> 5G denotes the fifth generation cellular network technology that provides broadband access.

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## Not Ruling Over but Feeding the Sheep: Thoughts on the Boundaries of Authority and Power in the Chinese Church

By Li Jin

The structure of power in the church is shaped and influenced by its social environment. In the works of the early church fathers, there is much discussion about pastoral ethics. Pastors are not merely shepherds with the responsibility of understanding and watching over the sheep; they are also responsible for governing the church. Congregations have the responsibility to submit to pastoral authority.



In premodern society, the office of pastor implied a paternalistic, patriarchal authority. The authority in the church, to some extent, had the same structure as the hierarchy in a feudal system. In other words, a person's position and authority in church was equal to his identity and authority in society. Recently, in the American evangelical movement, the emphasis of the emerging church on spiritual fellowship and relationships on a small scale is still a reactionary response to the traditional, institutional, hierarchical church.

Although the Chinese church faces the same challenge of a modern environment as the Western church, the Chinese church manifests some unique traits. This process can be viewed as a movement opposite to that of the West. Unlike the Western church in its modern situation, the Chinese church is attempting to build a formal structure of authority and power from an informal structure of authority and power.

A great number of meeting places for house churches appeared in the 1980s. A main trait of these was that the congregations were small fellowships led by Christians who came from a legacy of faith and family predating 1949. Because of political oppression and restriction during the 1980s and 90s, faith was primarily spread by social networks among relatives and close friends, and these carried certain traits of the traditional, Chinese, mid- to small-church as well as of Jesus Family churches.

The organization of these gatherings was very similar to the current emerging church in the West. It was often a fellowship formed by family members and friendships. In these situations, the elders in the family naturally took up leadership roles in the church and guided the congregations' lives by informal methods. From clothing and manners in church, to a believer's work, to marriage choices, the opinions of these paternalistic leaders had great influence over believers.

Coming from such a background, the new generation of Chinese urban Christians are dissatisfied with the paternalistic style of the older generation of church leaders, to the point that conflicts arise in understanding and implementing church governance. Furthermore, as the number of Christians with formal theological training increases, people hope the institutional church will standardize church discipline and temper leaders with a paternalistic style.

Some leaders opposed institutionalizing the church and professionalizing pastoral ministry, even to the point of refusing ordination. Instead, they emphasize inner life as the source of authority. However, they are still unable to escape the possibility of the formation and abuse of paternalistic power.

Beginning in 2000, many urban churches began to unite in denominations, introduced membership systems, wrote church charters, ordained pastors, and so on. Throughout this process, paternalistic authority was challenged. There was conflict between the positions of these two church power structures, causing some church divisions. According to general observation, it was not reconciliation that eliminated conflict and transformed the power structure. Instead, the tension between the two has been eased because of the passing of the older generation of house church leaders as well as the emergence of new urban churches. However, this does not mean that churches who have begun institutionalizing have altogether avoided the temptation to abuse power.

Meanwhile, in Western Christianity, a type of orientalism exists—a romanticized understanding of the Chinese church. On the one hand, they believe that Chinese Christians face unfair political oppression and suppression, and so they are full of admiration for the spiritual stories and sincere testimonies of Chinese Christians. On the other hand, as the number of Chinese Christians has increased in recent years, the hope that China will become the next Christendom has arisen in Western media and missions.

We must acknowledge that there are many beautiful testimonies among Chinese Christians. However, we cannot ignore the actual conditions of the church, especially regarding the question of power. Indeed, since Christianity first arrived in China, the church has been conflicted over the question of the limits of power. During the Republican era, Christian leaders and intellectuals, such as Wei Zhuo-min (Francis Wei) and Zhao Zi-chen (T. C. Chao), wrote critical articles concerning church leaders abusing their own power and authority under the double reinforcement of Chinese culture and church hierarchy.<sup>1</sup>

Here we must acknowledge a commonly known fact: even in America—although there are external laws and various internal denominational governing committees—many cases of power abuse still occur in many churches and denominations with mature governing structures. One can imagine the condition of the Chinese church which lacks outward supervision and the restraint of applicable laws.

First, the outward political environment has caused the Chinese church to face a dilemma of power and rights. Currently, the Chinese church does not enjoy the right to register legally without consequences. Not only do unregistered churches face oppression, they may be driven from meeting places at any time by the government and are unable to enjoy the rights of a legal entity. For example, they cannot buy property as a church. This situation has caused a vacuum of legal power, that is, church finance and church property are for the most part private, often registered in the name of church leaders. In practice, this relies on a person's character and the oversight of close acquaintances. At the same time, the church leader's power is strengthened and is easily abused with respect to finances. In my field observation, there is no lack of examples of church finances being misappropriated by church leaders or their children. For believers, when they face abuse of church power or are harmed themselves, they are unable to obtain legal help and protection because of the lack of applicable laws. Sometimes, churches promote spiritual authority to an extreme, isolating the congregation's reasonable requests beyond the oversight of secular law and so intensify the abuse of power.

Second, the church's inner institutionalization may not be able to limit power. Recently, many urban churches have learned to import membership systems and denominational governance from Western churches. They are becoming more regular in terms of church finance and discipline. However, this has not completely overcome the power of the traditional, paternalistic system. On the contrary, in terms of institutionalization, it has even strengthened some previously informal abuses of power.

In some churches that have implemented a membership system, the charter is unfair when it comes to the responsibilities and rights of the members. It demands that members attend Sunday services a specific number of times, tithe a certain amount, submit to church authority, and other requirements. However, it lacks protection for members who reasonably question the church's abuse of power. When members question the pastor's abuse of power or the content of sermons, they are often labeled as "insubordinate." With regards to theological knowledge, the average member is not equal to the increasingly professionalized pastor of the church. Therefore, members are unable to make appeals based on theology or the church system on an equal footing. Rather, they must choose between leaving the church or submitting to the pastor's decision.

Some theological confusion also intensified this trend. For example, the theme of the May 2018 issue of the online Chinese Christian journal *ChurchChina* is "I Believe in the Church." A few articles in this issue sparked great controversy on the Internet.<sup>3</sup> Critics believed that this was a sign of strengthening religious authority in China—replacing the global church with the local church, overly emphasizing commitment and submission to the church, mistakenly viewing the church as the goal of general history, believing "*today every local church is an eschatological presence of the heavenly common humanity; today every visible church is the New Jerusalem clothed with a historic coat, a scaffolding of the heavenly human city.*"<sup>3</sup>

A Christian scholar once criticized this, saying, "In the process of overemphasizing the church's power, people have neglected to ask, within these seemingly theological, politically correct slogans, where the limits of church power are. They have also forgotten that people who wield such power are also sinners."<sup>4</sup> In reality, the church's power to interfere in believers' marriages, work, and family is often a topic of criticism and controversy. For example, some older Christian women have been disciplined by the church for marrying non-Christians without having received any counseling or guidance. There have been incidents where pastors demanded the bride and groom confess their sin during their wedding and similar abuses.

Currently, the Chinese church has not sufficiently clarified the relationship between the universal church and the local church, nor has it defined the difference between the church in theological underpinnings and the church in practice. Especially in the current external environment of governmental pressure, Chinese Christians still face the question of how to handle well the boundaries between a pastor's authority and office in the application of power in a specific church.

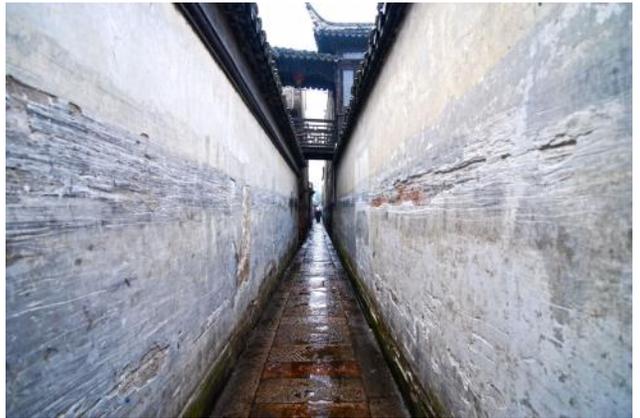
Power is not a physical object. On the contrary, it is reflected in relationships and is manifest in the extent to which a person can

**Continued on page 12**

## Being on Guard against “Spiritualized Political Correctness” in the Church

By Sam Ren

What are the behavioral norms for Christians? The Ten Commandments and Jesus’ teachings are the guides for Christian behavior. The church should encourage believers to live out their faith as testimony, but we need to be on guard against the following phenomenon: turning living faith into dogma that leads to the development of rigid, spiritualized, political correctness in the church.



### A Case Study

A church in an eastern Chinese city runs a church school, and many believers send their children to school there. However, due to various considerations, such as transitioning to a different educational system after high school graduation, or concerns that the church school was not well enough developed, some parents chose to send their children to public schools. Therefore with the pastoral staff at the church continuously elaborating on the ideologically-opposed nature of the public schools, many believers questioned the faith of parents who sent their children to public schools. Then church leaders began to preach that sending children to public schools was idolatry. Several years later, a kind of spiritualized political correctness formed in the church implying that children of Christians must attend church school, otherwise they were unspiritual.

This kind of political correctness in the area of education continued to spread in this church.

Following are some outcomes of this spiritualized political correctness.

1. Those who work as teachers in public schools need to bravely resist the schools’ ideology. Something must be wrong with the faith of Christian teachers who have not had a confrontation over faith in schools run by the atheist government.
2. A wife should stay at home to support her husband and instruct her children. She should not be employed outside the home because this is the duty of the wife and the order God has ordained.
3. Christians should have many children; this is not only the teaching of scripture but also a means to enlarge God’s kingdom.
4. Since Christians are sojourners in this world, they should not buy a home as renting is seen as a more spiritual lifestyle.

When these seemingly spiritual teachings are continuously reinforced in the church, they become psychological shackles for many people. Although all teachers working in public schools face tension with their faith, the degree of tension is not the same for everyone. For those teaching subjects such as mathematics or science, the conflict between work and faith has not been that great. While supporting her husband and instructing her children at home is seen as work for the wife, for many families this is simply a domestic arrangement. When the husband’s income is not adequate to support the family, it is necessary for the wife to work outside the home. Making decisions about the number of children to have is a matter of family planning for Christians, not a matter for church planning. According to the logic of the teaching of the church mentioned above, the greater the number of children, the greater their spirituality. Does that mean there is something wrong with the faith of parents who do not have many children? To buy or to rent an apartment is an individual economic decision for the Christian, not an expression of one’s faith.

Spiritualized political correctness is a strong form of legalism. Once it is shrouded by an appearance of spirituality, believers have a hard time detecting it. Although believers may have a deep sense that their conscience is being controlled (i.e. manipulated), they are unable to identify why they feel this way. If this continues for long, the following may happen: teachers at public schools, young mothers trying to make ends meet, parents with only one child, and families who have purchased a home will face much peer pressure at church. Conversely, mothers who quit their jobs, parents with many children, and church members who rent their home may easily develop spiritual pride.

These seemingly spiritual teachings are a form of interference by the church in the private life of families and individuals. This results in churches and pastors thinking for believers. Over time, the ability of believers to think for themselves steadily deteriorates. In the end, spiritualized political correctness may easily take the place of believers thinking independently.

## The Causes of Spiritualized Political Correctness

The current situation of the church in China, both internally and externally, has provided the soil for the growth of spiritual political correctness.

### Long-term Marginalization of the Church

*First, society's rejection of the church and long-term marginalization has caused the church to lose its tolerance.* There is quite a bit of tension between Chinese society and Christianity, causing church life to be full of stress and anxiety. As a result, some churches leave Christians relatively little personal space. In churches in China, especially house churches, church leaders provide believers not only with answers to spiritual matters but frequently with answers to political, social, economic, and educational matters as well.

There is a great deal of resemblance to fundamentalist churches in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s. Because of its rejection by mainstream society and its shrinking influence, the fundamentalist movement became legalistic, rigid, and combative. The sense of tension with the outside world and the overly fearful attitude toward the secularization of faith led churches to provide standards of behavior for all aspects of life. Not only were alcohol and dancing prohibited, even seeing movies was not allowed.

According to my observations, this kind of spiritualized political correctness becomes a source of pressure for many Christians from the middle class since their lives are relatively closely connected with mainstream society. At the same time, Christians who exist at the margins of society, on the whole, do not reject this kind of simple and rigid teaching because the sense of disconnect between their lives and society is already relatively strong. Theologian Richard Niebuhr, in his classic work *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, analyzed the relationship between the social class of Christians and their respective theological positions. He discovered that some positions of faith adopted by Christians were an outcome of their social circumstances, but Christians often assumed that these positions originated in scripture.

### Low-cost Maintenance of Faith

*Second, spiritualized political correctness is a way to maintain faith at a low cost.* However, we need also to note that spiritualized political correctness is not something that church authority can create and shape on its own. Spiritualized political correctness is a kind of understanding of faith that simplifies it and makes it mechanical. Believers are occupied by the minutiae of everyday life and may be unable or unwilling to make a serious effort to read scripture or reflect on their faith, so the answers provided by spiritualized political correctness become like fast food, the easiest to digest and fill the belly. Such simplistic and rigid spiritual answers will not satisfy believers who are thoughtful and alert. For believers to seriously study scripture and understand the interaction between Christianity and historical society takes time and a gradual accumulation of understanding.

Over recent decades, the number of Christians in China has grown very quickly, such that many have not been in the faith for a long time. For these Christians, their faith is new, but their worldview and mode of thinking remain old. Thus, it has been unavoidable that Chinese society's long-standing, ideological mode of thinking has been brought into the church. For many Christians who are unwilling to spend the time and effort to seriously reflect on their faith, this kind of rigid teaching gives them a low-cost way to achieve an understanding of their faith.

### A Need for Certainty

*Third, authoritarian society and modern risk society incline believers to find rigid, absolute theoretical formulations (doctrines) appealing.* In recent years, the books of an extremely conservative Reformed pastor have become very popular in Christian circles in China. His theories on family worship, devotion, and marriage have attracted the following of many. During the church's worship service where he pastors, men wear suits and women wear long skirts and hats. The service is very long with the sermon running up to an hour and a half, and even very young children must sit and listen through the entire duration. However, the scandals of his earlier church split and divorce have given him a bad reputation in the United States, and his seminary is not very influential there. But when his books reached countries with an authoritarian culture, such as South Korea, Brazil, and China, the Christians there found his books very appealing.

I have discovered that, although the theological vision in this pastor's preaching and books is very narrow, he has nonetheless provided some relatively unambiguous answers for people such as what men should do, what women should do, what the order of the family should be, and what Christians should do in order to be faithful in modern society. These rigid, yet straightforward, views attract people who live in the midst of modern ambiguities. Moreover, the discipline that the authoritarian culture placed on people in the past has made it easy for these believers to accept relatively inflexible, theoretical formulations (doctrines). What is regrettable, however, is that while rigid theories certainly give people a "right" answer, faith and life are living things. Over time, such teaching can easily turn into a legalistic faith and end up as spiritualized political correctness.

Spiritualized political correctness is comparable to standardized parts on an assembly line. While it is simple and easy to handle and quickly achieves the effect of shaping believers' thoughts and behavior, over time such spiritualized political correctness harms faith and the church, and prepares the ground for the abuse of power by pastors. Its potential to cause harm is worth our serious attention.

*Translation is by ChinaSource.*

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1922), p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> "Risk society" is apparently a term coined and defined separately by sociologists Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck and associated with analyses of modern society; see Wikipedia entry on the term: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Risk\\_society](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Risk_society).

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## **Editorial: Witnessing Christ through Ethical Leadership**

**Continued from page 2**

In the Resource Corner, we provide a few links to Christian psychologist and #MeToo advocate Diane Lanberg's talks on power and authority in the church.

It is our sincere hope that this issue of *ChinaSource Quarterly* will inform you about current dynamics in the Chinese church. May God help us to stay vigilant together even as the night grows darker.

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\* Diane Langberg, "Power, Deception, and the Church," A Plenary Speech at the American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC) National Conference, Dallas, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ncii2Hf3ouQ>

Mary Li Ma (MA Li) holds a PhD in sociology from Cornell University. Currently she is a research fellow at the Henry Institute of Christianity and Public Life at Calvin College.

LI Jin is a PhD student at Calvin Theological Seminary who writes on Christian thought for both public and Christian media outlets in

## **Not Ruling Over but Feeding the Sheep**

**Continued from page 9**

decide the actions and decisions of others. Neither the traditional paternalistic system of the past nor the institutional church of the West has provided the Chinese church with a method of solving power abuse once and for all. Contemporary Chinese Christians need to consider these issues with a heart of love and humility.

*Translation is by ChinaSource.*

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<sup>1</sup> For details, see Francis Wei (Wei Zhuomin), "Making Christianity Live in China," collected in *Works of Wei Zhuomin*, Vol. 11 (Wuhan: Central China Normal University Publishing House, 2016), pp29-30. T. C. Chao, "Christianity and the National Crisis," *The Collected English Writings of Tsy Chen Chao* (Works of T.C. Chao, Vol.5), (Beijing: Religion Culture Publishing House, 2009), pp.399-403.

<sup>2</sup> Yi Le, "Church as the Goal of History," *ChurchChina*, May, 2018. <https://www.churchchina.org/archives/180502.html>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with L.

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## ChinaSource Perspective

### Walking in the Light and the Need for Vigilance

By Kerry Schottelkorb

We are delighted to once again have mainland scholars Mary Li Ma and LI Jin guest editing the summer issue of *ChinaSource Quarterly* on leadership ethics. This is their fifth issue of CSQ!\*

A foundational scripture passage for this issue comes from the apostle John:

If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son, purifies us from all sin.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

1 John 1:7-10 NIV

In a timely and relevant way, our editors and writers have chosen to bring the subject of leadership ethics within the church in China into the light. This is a sensitive topic. In the majority of cases we are thankful for spiritual leaders—for pastors and shepherds who have sacrificially invested in our well-being and the nurture of our souls. Also, we know the Holy Spirit has facilitated the rapid growth of the church in China through the lives of countless faithful leaders.

However, as we will read, if we romanticize our leaders, we will miss the opportunity for godly redemption, healing, growth, and kingdom fruit that remains.

We are reminded in this issue that all—even our leaders—“have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23)

As a local church pastor for twenty years, the Lord regularly reminded me that “his power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). All authority and power is his. My calling was to daily receive and offer his grace and mercy, the distinguishing features of our walk in Christ.

It was often a bumpy ride because I wanted to be great for God instead of strong in him. I wanted to **do** great things to see his church grow and his kingdom advanced. He was calling me to **be** his humble worshipper and follower.

Leaders must be vigilant in waiting on the Lord and walking his path with their brothers and sisters. Otherwise they will easily become isolated outside of Christ’s community to their peril. I resonate with the themes of this issue. They are so relevant to my own experience and, I believe, to the life experience of leaders throughout the global body of Christ who have ears to hear and eyes to see.

In his review of the book *The Apostates*, by Wei Shi, Jeshurun Lin makes this stunning yet freeing observation:

With the life of each person in the novel exposed during that period of China’s history (a time of intense political campaign), one discovers that Wei Shi is expounding an important tenet of spiritual life stated by Calvin in his *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*: “Know God; know yourself.” During that era, it seems that only those who had come to recognize their own weakness and depravity under the light of God were able to truly stand firm. The recognition of one’s own lack of devoutness and holiness allowed one to trust in God in the time of testing and live out his mercy.

The light of the scriptures reveals this to be true in every era.

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\* Mary Li Ma and LI Jin have guest edited: [“Theological Reflections on Urban Churches in China,”](#) [“Christian Ethics and Family Living in China,”](#) [“Christian Living in the City,”](#) and [“Denominationalism in China.”](#)

Kerry Schottelkorb is the president of ChinaSource.



## Book Review

### When a Celebrity Pastor Falls, Will There Be Apostates?

Reviewed by Jeshurun Lin

《叛教者》, (*The Apostates*, titled *Renegades* on Amazon), Wei Shi. In Chinese only. Dixie W Publishing Corporation, 2016, 378 pages. ISBN-10:1683720121, ISBN-13: 978-1683720126; paperback, \$19.95 at Amazon.

The following is a summary of Jeshurun Lin's review. The full review in Chinese is available at [当牧者跌落神坛，我会成为叛教者吗?](http://www.wxibible.net/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=show&catid=16&id=638), <http://www.wxibible.net/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=show&catid=16&id=638>.



Shi Wei's *The Apostates* uses the medium of a novel to describe a period of history in China's churches in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century during Maoist campaigns. This novel describes the church experiencing an environment of instability and persecution. The protagonist, Li Yesheng, a pastor and author of sermons and spiritual books, faces morality issues; the impacts and results of his choices are tracked. The novel has four sections: The Apostates, The Sacrificial Victims, The Followers, and The Breakers of Bread.

#### The Apostates

The first section deals with Sister Xu Wenyin, a believer in the Lord in a local church in Shanghai. She completely gave herself to the Lord and because of her total dedication was nicknamed "holy woman." However, when she discovers that pastor Li Yesheng is in a sexual relationship with her boyfriend's older sister, she feels that everything she has pursued is only an illusion. In a flash, her faith completely collapses. Without hesitating, she stands up and becomes the first person to accuse Li Yesheng. That accusation causes the collapse of the church in the entire area and Sister Xu Wenyin becomes the first "apostate."

#### The Sacrificial Victims

The second section is the heart of the book. It focuses on Li Yesheng's four women co-workers, Li Rushi, Wang Muzhen, Zhao Xinjie, and Liao Wenjun, and their relationships. Li Yesheng eventually has sexual relationships with two of these women, and the novel delves into the consequences and outcomes of these relationships.

Li Rushi is a gifted, intelligent woman, strong and self-reliant, who has completely given herself over to Jesus. She works with Li Yesheng in his literary work and follows his lead. Through his publications, Li Yesheng's influence has spread not only throughout China, but the whole world. However, of Li Yesheng's three full-length books and 62 pamphlets, only two or three volumes were actually written by him; most were based on his sayings but written by Li Rushi. Without her, there would have been no Li Yesheng. Her motivation was not from personal feelings or selfish desires but completely from her love for God. These two partners, who together founded the historical, spiritual splendour of the Chinese church, will eventually become enemies.

When Li Rushi first discovers Li Yesheng is in a sexual relationship with Zhao Xinjie, she cannot comprehend how a godly servant like Brother Li can possibly experience lust. Then, when Li Rushi discovers that Li Yesheng has also defiled Liao Wenjun, she is shattered. She has no way of reconciling Li Yesheng's spiritual teachings with his poor ethical standards; she must choose between the man and his teachings or her standards based on God's truth. She cannot deny the glaringly obvious, but since she cannot separate God's truth from Li Yesheng's spiritual teachings, she ends up by denying God. The author then goes on to explore her thinking that caused her to give up her faith.

Wang Muzhen is also a co-worker. She, Li Rushi, and Li Yesheng are leaders in the local church. While Wang Muzhen is Li Yesheng's right hand, she is also a very gifted preacher. When she realizes that God has chosen to use Li Yesheng to speak to the church, she retreats backstage. In submission to Li Yesheng, she leaves the pulpit and begins to serve the church's children—even though she had led the church until Li Yesheng appeared on the scene.

Later, as this is during political campaigns, Wang Muzhen and Li Rushi are arrested together. After Wang Muzhen finds out about Li Yesheng's personal troubles, she and Li Rushi together denounce Li Yesheng; both give up their faith. The author then examines the inner workings of these women that relate to their actions.

During Li Rushi's 19 years in prison, she is unable to find freedom because she cannot forgive herself. She feels that she was conned by Li Yesheng and also deceived by God. She cannot accept her own sinfulness. Rather, she does nothing but accuse others

in order to shorten her sentence.

Among the four women connected with Li Yesheng, after he is taken into custody and his morality issues are exposed, only Liao Wenjun does not fall away. She neither denounces nor condemns Li Yesheng. Li Yesheng's wife, Zhang Huiwen, takes the same position as Liao Wenjun. She is clearly aware of the sins her husband has committed, but she accepts him in love and bears her shame in silence.

### **The Followers**

The third part of the novel tells the stories of the faithful witnesses in the local church—their perseverance to the end, even unto death. Not only do they not deny God, they also do not abandon their spiritual leader. During this “meat grinder” era, when no one was really safe from accusation, how were believers able to protect themselves and stand spiritually firm? The novel relates the stories of three people: Zhang Maoliang, Yu Huaen and Huang Yuzhi.

Zhang Enrong is angry when his son, Zhang Maoliang, rises to denounce Li Yesheng. As he is dying, he says, “The Lord knows.” This saying establishes a tradition in the local church: to not debate and to leave it to the Lord's sovereignty. However, for the younger generation this makes no sense. They want an explanation, an answer.

Brother Yu Huaen has the strongest spiritual life of anyone in the local church. When he faces the judgement of the camp chief, he is calmer than anyone else. He does not tremble or fall apart because he has already trembled before the holy gaze of God and fallen apart before him countless times—and every time he has received God's forgiveness. When he is martyred, his son cannot keep from castigating Li Yesheng saying he caused his father's death. However, his mother says to him, “Your father never hated anyone; it is unfitting for you, his son, to hate anyone.”

Huang Yuzhi is not only earnest and straightforward, he is also filled with love and mercy for his brothers. He loves Li Yesheng and questions him about his repentance; he accepts him because he sees his repentance and return to God. On the other hand, he sees the wrong ways the church has gone about resolving the problem of Li Yesheng. In prison, Huang Yuzhi has a moment of weakness where he considers suicide. But in that moment, he experiences God's mercy. His execution comes when he turns to a weak brother who ran away and extends to him mercy and acceptance. In that era, even the closest of intimates would act in self-preservation by completely denying their relationships.

With the life of each person in the novel exposed during that period of China's history, one discovers that Shi Wei is expounding an important tenet of spiritual life stated by Calvin in his *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*: “Know God; know yourself.” During that era, it seems that only those who had come to recognize their own weaknesses and depravity under the light of God were able to truly stand firm. The recognition of one's own lack of devoutness and holiness allowed one to trust in God in the time of testing and live out his mercy.

People who understand a little of the history of the Chinese church will know that this novel is using Brother Ni Tuosheng (better known in the West as Watchman Nee) and the founding of the Little Flock church (also called the Local Church) as its original material. In this novel, the author points out the Little Flock's worship of its spiritual leader, Brother Ni Tuosheng, which finally led the entire church astray. In present-day Little Flock churches, many still believe that Brother Ni had a special revelation from God and that he was morally perfect. Over a decade ago, Dr Liang Jialin (now the principal of Jiandao Seminary) investigated the personal moral problems of Brother Ni Tuosheng, and based on eyewitness material, he reached the verdict that it was certain Brother Ni had committed sexual sin. The result was a great deal of “righteous anger” from the members of Little Flock. They subjected Dr Liang to verbal abuse that culminated in character assassination and questioned his salvation.

We need to respect our leaders and study the traditions of previous generations. However, to deify church leaders, to put them on a pedestal, is no different than idol worship. It is far from biblical teaching and is dangerous. While the church leader has some responsibility when this happens, the primary responsibility falls upon the brothers and sisters of the church.

### **The Breakers of Bread**

In this final section, the imprisoned Li Yesheng conducts a soul-searching self-reflection regarding the problems in the church. He concludes that the tragedies of these individuals were not his fault. “They are the Lord's disciples,” he says. “The Lord struck them; the Lord bound them up.... The Lord chose to break them into pieces for the sake of his election, just as he has broken me; this was of his determining and of his love. I am no more than a stick God has chosen to pick up and wield.”

This recognition comes to Li Yesheng only when he thinks upon his service. Will people who read this novel understand the cry of the author? If we had been thrown into the “meat grinder” era, would we also have become apostate?

However, Shi Wei does not let us stop there. The gospel accounts do not stop with the night before Jesus’ passion—Judas selling out the Lord, the disciples scattering, and Peter denying the Lord three times. Instead, the gospels take us through the cross to Easter morning. In the midst of human weakness and depravity, Jesus’ body is torn and his blood spilt. His blood flows for the sins of many. His body is torn to feed us to fullness.

At the conclusion of the novel, through Li Yesheng’s self-examination in prison, we perceive God’s fathomless love for those who love him. This love is greater than we human beings can imagine—greater than words can relate. Conversely, this love flows from the bitter suffering and shame of the cross. This is the glory of God!

*Original article at: [当牧者跌落神坛，我会成为叛教者吗？](#),*

*Translated and summarized by ChinaSource. Used with permission.*

*Jeshurun Lin pastors a church in Beijing.*

## Resource Corner

### **Online Videos on the Church and Misuse of Authority**

*Online Videos by Dr. Diane Langberg*

[“Power, Deception, and the Church,”](#)

Dr. Langberg’s plenary speech on the 2018 American Association of Christian Counselors, Dallas

[“Use and Misuse of Authority”](#)

[“Narcissism and the System It Breeds”](#)

[“The Church as a Healing Community”](#)

Christian counselor, Diane Langberg, PhD, shares her videos online. A practicing psychologist whose clinical expertise includes 45 years of working with trauma survivors and clergy, she speaks internationally on topics related to trauma, ministry and the Christian life. She is the director of Diane Langberg, PhD & Associates, a group practice in suburban Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and is clinical faculty at Biblical Theological Seminary where she co-leads the Global Trauma Recovery Institute with Dr. Phil Monroe. She is the author of several books and contributes to many publications.

Dr. Langberg serves on the board of GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in a Christian Environment), is co-chair of American Bible Society’s Trauma Advisory Council and the recipient of numerous awards. She is married with two sons and four grandchildren.

Visit her website at: <http://www.dianelangberg.com/videos/>



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