

CHINA PROJECT
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Every couple of years or so, I try to read some of the writings of Frederick Nietzsche, a German philosopher of the late 19th century whose influence in the world continues even to this day. Perhaps, some of you have read his popular parable, *The Madman*. In it he wrote:

Have you not heard of the madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran through the market place, and cried incessantly, "I am looking for God. I am looking for God!" As many who did not believe in God were standing together, he excited considerable laughter. "Why, did he get lost?" one asked. "Did he lose his way like a child?" "Or is he hiding?" "Is he afraid of us?" "Has he gone on a voyage?" Thus they yelled and laughed. The madman sprung into their midst and pierced them with his glances. "Whither is God?" he cried. "I shall tell you. We have killed him. You and I. All of us are murderers. Do you not hear the noise of grave-diggers who are burying God? Do you not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? Gods, too, must decompose. God is dead and we have killed him." . . . "What are these churches now if they are not tombs and sepulchers of God?"

Or maybe you might remember Nietzsche's words in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. The story starts with Zarathustra coming into town and starting a conversation with a hermit. In it, Zarathustra said that he was leaving the mountain and returning to the depths to shatter the myths man believed – the myths of virtue, morality, and God. He turned to the hermit and asked him, "Has no one told you that God is dead?" The story gets interesting at this point, but what Nietzsche describes in these two stories is a life without God and without morals.

Have you ever wondered if Nietzsche is right; entirely right? Who is, or was there ever a historical Jesus? What would the world be like without God, or what the world would be like without God incarnate, Jesus, and if Jesus really did not die or never was raised from the dead? What if there was no such thing as evil or any understanding of evil? What if claims, which may very well be true in principle are always open to revision and may some times be abandoned completely? A pervasive feature of modern critical reason is radical doubt, permeating into every area of life as well as philosophical consciousness that insists that all knowledge take the form of a hypothesis. This is worldwide, but clearly the case in most of China.

These are questions that are raised by many Chinese, even though capitalism and materialism are evident and thriving everywhere. I think it explains the growth of

the church, both Three-Self Patriotic Movement Church (or officially recognized and registered church) and the house church or family church movement. As a professor in China wrote, people have questions and were not happy in years past. Now with all of the economic growth and materialism, they still are not happy. There is a hole in their souls. The statistics regarding this growth are hard to determine, mainly because the government does not recognize the house church movement where much of the growth is occurring.

One of my favorite verses is 1 Chronicles 12:31 in which in the middle of two chapters identifying the warriors that helped make David a great king, there were the sons of Issachar who knew the times and what Israel should do. You see, for many of us, we don't really know the culture in which we live, and worse yet, many of us do not know the history of ideas that shape our culture. As a result, we cannot know what direction our country and our church should take. Much of my efforts regarding China are attempts to know the culture, the history of driving ideas, and how I might better minister in the church, the seminary, the university, and through my personal contacts and relationships. So much of what goes on in China is dependent upon relationships.

Chinese President, Xi Jinping, since the beginning of his presidency, has been on a war against corruption; corruption in government, corruption in business and industry, and corruption in the nonprofit sector. The problem is that there are no clear standards against which claims of corruption can be measured. Some of the data regarding religion and religious freedom in China is dated, as there is now a crackdown by government officials on religious groups and human rights groups that are not recognized by the government. This has particularly affected human rights lawyers. But, there is also interest in judicial reform in China, primarily in the academy. And this is an area I address and try to facilitate discussion among professors of law.

God has been gracious to open opportunities to me, and surround me with wonderful relationships in China. I have so many Christian law professor friends in all of these universities and keep in contact with them. I have worked with a number of them to obtain rights to publish American and British works on legal subjects in Chinese, particularly works that reflect Christian thought. It has also been the support of Greenwich Presbyterian Church, and a number of friends and churches that have made this possible and have encouraged me.

In addition to my regular teaching appointment on *Christian Worldview and Ethics* in a theological seminary in Beijing, I am now a regularly appointed visiting professor at five universities in Beijing and two in Henan Province in Central China, with invitations from three more major universities in Beijing. The doors God has opened allows me to combine my teaching on a Christian worldview and ethics with my teaching in the law schools. My university teaching has allowed me to address human rights, religious freedom, ethics and law, and matter relating to

judicial reform from a Christian worldview. In every lecture, I have had the opportunity to present the Gospel.

There was a lot of interest in, and many questions regarding the U.S. election in 2016. This opened up many doors for discussion in a number of universities and in public forums. Indeed, just this week in February 2017, I was engaged in a long, two-hour online dialogue on ethics with about 55 former students of mine from the seminary. What fascinated me about the questions and arguments were how focused they were on a few-sexual ethics related issues. Indeed, a number of law and political science professors in several universities defined Christianity in America along these lines. As noted author and authority, Yang Fenggang, writes, a problem in the Chinese church is that it follows what it thinks is the American model of Christianity that is limited to a few narrow sexual ethics-related issues.

Although I have been involved these past four years with the Asian Center for Law and Culture, my relationship to that Center was formalized this past November. The Asian Center for Law and Culture is a registered, public interest law firm, and arranges my talks with student groups and public forums, operating a bit like Veritas Forum in the U.S. All of my university lectures are arranged directly with university administration, including Party officials, and faculty. Other public engagements have been arranged by the Center with student groups and the legal community in much the same as Veritas Forum. The Center also has opened a platform for my writing and publishing of essays in China. My writing is translated by the Center staff and published by Chinese publishing houses.

I continue to be active in the global law firm, DLA Piper, mentoring young lawyers in the firm's Beijing office. When I am not in class, I am with the lawyers in the firm.

God is blessing me beyond all description. I never would have guessed that as a lawyer, God could use me in this way in China, or indeed, anywhere else. It has also been the support of Greenwich Presbyterian Church, and a number of friends and churches that have made this possible, advised me, and have encouraged me. Thank you so much Greenwich Presbyterian Church!