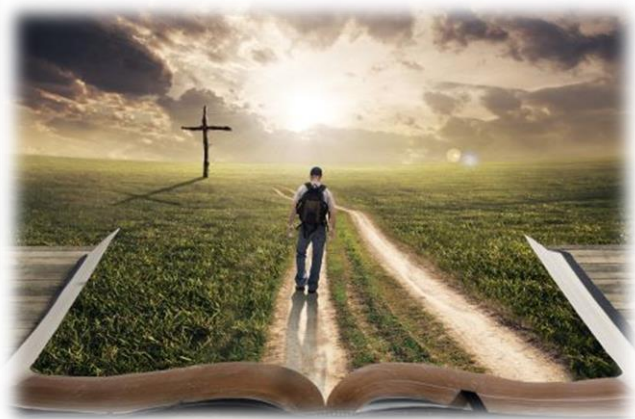


To Serve Without Fear

- The 2019 Extradition Bill and the Outlook of China Ministry

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The issues brought about by the proposed amendment of the Extradition Bill are not limited to the tremendous drop of the HKSAR government's governing ability and skyrocketing of police-citizen relations. Negative impacts brought upon interpersonal relationships due to having different political views now is even worse than debates over political reforms back in 2014. Nevertheless, the focus of this article is not problems in Hong Kong caused by the Extradition Bill, but to discuss how the proposed bill has affected Hong Kong people's participation in China ministries.

Adversity should be the norm

One of the reasons people raise in opposition to the Extradition Bill amendment is that once the bill passes, the risks of participating in China ministries will increase. The existing Extradition Bill does not include mainland China, Taiwan, and Macau; and the controversy lies precisely in those three regions. Those who raise this point of argument believe that the risks of being extradited back to mainland China upon returning to Hong Kong from

ministries will increase should the bill be passed. Some even claim that evangelism in the north would become impossible.

This argument in fact reflects a shallow understanding of the actual situation of China ministries. Perhaps our experience of China ministries in the past twenty years have led us to feel that to preach, teach, disciple, evangelize, or even run summer camps in the mainland is a natural thing to be able to do. It wasn't until recent years, when crosses have been demolished and many ministries have been banned, that we have begun to realize that there are risks in conducting China ministries. It should be noted, then, that to be faced with adversities is actually the norm; smooth sailing is God's grace, and not to be taken for granted.

From the perspective of world evangelism, China ministries have always lain between open and closed, free and restrained. Given the landmass of mainland China, the degree of openness to Christianity and extent of prosecution on the part of officials differ from region to region. Each church also has a different relationship with the local government and its neighbors. This explains how home churches are banned in one city and allowed to congregate openly the next. Some Three-Self churches can invite famous preachers from foreign countries while others may not even be able to invite preachers from Hong Kong. It is possible that churches in Xinjiang can freely congregate while pastors from Guangdong are being arrested.

Due to this irregularity, no matter what you say about churches in China, you may well be both right and wrong at the same time. We cannot make sweeping generalizations about the churches in China today, nor can we easily calculate the risks of participating in China ministries.

High-risk ministry

From the perspective of the overall development of churches in China, the risks of participating in China ministries has always been high. Ideologically speaking, China is hostile towards Christianity to begin with. Christianity is seen as a "foreign influence". Western missionaries, particularly American ones, are seen by the Chinese government as spies, whom go to China not only to gain information but also to spread "Western" values of democracy, liberalism, human rights, and other ideologies in attempt to poison the minds of Chinese citizens. For Christianity to survive in China, it must be Sinicized to thoroughly remove the "poison" of the West. Religion ceases to be a matter of personal faith, instead becoming a political issue. Hence, to the Chinese government, ministries in China are not merely a matter of personal faith, but a matter concerning politics, ideology, or even national security.

Aside from this, different regional religious affairs bureaus have different attitudes towards Christianity; there are no clear standards when it comes to implementing religious policies. Because of that, even if we are willing to comply with the policies, there is no guarantee that we wouldn't be crossing political red lines. We have seen from the incidences of cross demolition that there is no singular standard even when it is within the same

province; some churches had their crosses demolished, others had the cathedral itself taken down. Yet, in a neighboring province, large churches were being built. We have witnessed pastors being arrested for objecting to the demolition of crosses and charged with crimes that were completely irrelevant to religion. It is only understandable that many would be worried that if the Extradition Bill is passed, a similar fate would befall our own participants in China ministries.

The truth is, whether or not the amendment is passed, the risks are present. 90% of the brothers and sisters who have taken part in China ministries in the past encountered no major difficulties, yet the following still took place from time to time:

- Being questioned by the public security in custody and having personal information recorded;
- Having their Mainland Travel Permit confiscated and not being issued a new one for several years;
- Being arrested in the mainland, then undergoing a secret trial and being sentenced;
- Foreign ministry workers having their passports confiscated and being deported after getting them back.

Compared with those in the mainland, the abovementioned are trivial incidents. Years of observation have seen the following happen to church workers—both registered and non-registered churches:

- Churches and crosses being demolished, churches being forced to close down, church property being confiscated;
- Landlords being pressured into not renewing leases for church premises;
- Church workers and deacons being arrested, having their families, personal property and communication networks investigated
- Church workers being prosecuted for financial or more serious crimes, having their passports confiscated and their families forbidden from leaving the country.

The abovementioned have only become more common in recent years. From this perspective, it is understandable that ministry workers from Hong Kong would be worried about having to face similar situations as mainland ministry workers.

The cost of and response to missions

The ministry of missions is risky by nature. It is not romantic—costs need to be calculated. As mentioned at the start of this article, to be faced with adversities is actually the norm; it is only through God's grace have we been able to serve various regions safely in the past. Whether or not we have fully utilized such freedom is no longer important. If we believe that the love of the Lord has never left



churches in China, that He is still sovereign, what we must ask are these questions instead:

- How do ministry workers in the mainland view our past contributions? Have our past contributions helped them take up burdens of the churches' needs on their own?
- Some doors to ministries have been closed, but have new ones been opened?
- What are some lessons that we have yet to learn, that we must quickly catch up to now in order to continue serving?
- What can we prepare now in order to grasp the next opportunity?

We must always look ahead. The history of churches has taught us that, when faced with external pressure and prosecution, churches will only thrive even more. What really troubles a church is its internal problems. To this, CCL responds:

We will continue to walk with and serve ministries in the mainland, and support the livelihood of pastors in poor areas. We will continue promoting business as mission in cities, disciple and train young leaders through small groups and mentor-mentee relationships, and conduct "Living Word" Bible study training sessions for the purpose of cultivating more leaders who are after God's own heart. At the same time, we will grasp every publication and book-gifting opportunity to put spiritual resources into the hands of seminary graduates.

We are not unafraid, but we are learning to follow the Lord's teachings even more seriously:

"I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear. Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him."

— Luke 12:4-5

If the proposed amendment to the Extradition Bill is passed, it would seem that there would be less legal protection on the earth. However, as long-time participants in church ministries, we pray to God for fearlessness in our hearts as we serve, with wisdom, alongside workers in the mainland who have had to endure more severe hardships.

"Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness."

— Acts 4:29

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## Taking the First Step in Parent Education



© Pastor Ren

Pastor of a church in northern China

Student of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Professional Diploma  
in Christian Education<sup>1</sup>

After completing the two-year Christian education course, I have come to pay more attention to marriage and parent-child education, hoping to apply what I have learned to my ministry. In the old Sunday school model, the importance of parents in accompanying and influencing their children is often neglected, when in fact the family should be the first and foremost place for children to receive Christian education. Upon returning to my church, I started to work on parent education. As religious policies continue to tighten, I hope to nurture parents so that they can be our partners in helping children grow in their spiritual life.

### Introducing changes based on existing foundation

In Sunday schools in the past, our discussions with parents were often confined to the course curriculum and their children's performance. Seldom did we touch on parent education. After completing the Christian education course, I attempted to bring about some changes.

Raising parents' awareness on educating their own children: First, two parents' meetings were held between September last year and March this year, each lasting 50 minutes. The aim was to remind parents that the responsibility of educating their children does not rest solely on the school or the church. Parents have to teach their children as well. Meanwhile, we also held various parents' meetings based on the children's different age and grade, in which discussions were held on children's actual needs as they were growing up. Appropriate assistance was provided to the parents.

Guiding parents in practising what they learned: Since October last year, I have been holding parents' classes at the church every Saturday evening, with an average of 20



parents taking part. We share with parents the role they should play in teaching their children and how to put into practice what they have learned. The curriculum includes struggles in our beliefs, parents as role models, parent-child family education and learning the different characteristics of children at different stages of growth. Parents have benefitted a lot from the classes and identified some misunderstandings they held in the past.

### **Blessing front-line workers with my knowledge**

Apart from implementing parent education at the church, I also saw a need of front-line workers in my neighbouring churches for learning parent education. Therefore, in April this year, I consolidated my knowledge in theology and Christian education, and started a parent education course in the local Bible school, hoping to have an even greater influence on church workers.

In the design of the curriculum, I have drawn reference from my two-year Christian education course, including courses like “theory of character development”, “nurturing the character of children and teenagers”, “parent education”, “marriage and family”, etc. In the “marriage and family” course in particular, the following issues were explored: what am I living for? Why do I get married? Why am I raising children? [...] These are common yet easily overlooked questions which can stimulate our thinking on setting up a family.

In addition, the books recommended by teachers have also helped me a lot in my teaching and sharing in the Bible school. For example, books like “Raising Kids with Triune God” and “The Life You Want Your Kids to Live” are precious publication resources very much lacking in the mainland.

### **Conclusion**

In mainland churches, work on parent education is just beginning, and there is neither much experience to draw reference from nor adequate support. Difficulties seem inevitable, and we need more of God’s grace, as well as support and prayers from friends.

We still have much to learn and explore in parent education, but my dream is to enhance the role of the family in Christian education. I wish that parents can take the lead in educating their children, to be supported by teachings in Sunday schools, so that children’s character as well as knowledge and practice in Christian beliefs can be fully developed.

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1 The 12 students of the 2nd Professional Diploma in Christian Education held their thanksgiving luncheon on 26 November 2018. Lesson observations for graduation will be held in 2019.

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Prayers

1. Overcome the fear of serving in the mainland

There is a price to pay for ministering in the mainland. With or without the passage of the controversial extradition bill, China ministry is fraught with risks.

May the Lord protect workers who have faced long-term pressure serving in the mainland, that they will follow the Lord's teachings and be sensitive to His leading, overcome any fear and walk with mainland churches with wisdom. May the Lord give the workers courage and endurance!



2. Gifted books a blessing to teachers and graduates



In June, with God's grace, the book-gifting team distributed books to graduates in various districts before their graduation. A pastor who has taught at a theological seminary for 10 years in eastern China shared that the books are useful for preparing sermons, discipleship training, pre-marriage and post-marriage counselling etc. Teachers hope to use the materials in their upcoming volunteer training courses.

May the Lord use the books to support novice preachers and may He lead theological seminary teachers in using and making the book content relevant to the situation of mainland churches.

3. Creativity amidst difficult circumstances

Despite the difficult circumstances, our heavenly father has given pastors wisdom in continuing with pastoral ministry. With the ban on children's Sunday school, pastors in northern China who finished Christian education courses have started parent education ministries to help parents help their kids be firmly rooted in their faith. Preachers in the East have switched from helping children develop Christian values to guiding young adult workers' exploration of faith.



May the Lord help Christian workers use what they have learned to build up and minister to believers. May the Lord bless pastors with wisdom, and help them share the unchanging, core message of the gospel with others in creative ways.

4. Clamp down on unsafe foods



The Public Security Bureau said at a press conference in late June in Beijing that it had cracked down on 4,500 cases of dangerous food nationwide in the first 5 months of this year, making more than 8,500 arrests, smashing more than 3,800 “black (unscrupulous) factories, workshops” whose food products seriously endangered people’s health.

May the Lord let the enforcement authorities take a harsh stance against workshops producing contaminated food which had harmed many lives in the past. May the Lord send churches into the community to care for people’s livelihood besides religious needs.

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