

## **Marketplace Fencing**

### **– Tackling Mainland Business Ethics Problems**

© Guan Bao  
Marketplace Teaching Instructor

Although the ageing trend has brought much influence on the mainland workforce in recent years, the working population is still large. The National Bureau of Statistics of China announced that in 2019 the working-age population (aged 16 to 59) amounted to nearly 900 million and comprised 64% of the total population<sup>1</sup>. This big working population is in fact a field pending exploration by the Gospel ministry. However, church ministries committed to this social sector are yet to be developed in China. The churches in general are unable to grasp the marketplace ecology, and the lack of pastors with knowledge in marketplace theology handicaps the ministry work of Christians and makes it hard to motivate Christians to lead people to God in their marketplace. Especially difficult is the situation when an ethical issue of the marketplace arises and a Christian has to struggle with his faith. However, one's pastor is often unable to provide suitable admonitions.



As marketplace teaching instructors, we hope to bring some solutions to pastors, equipping them with knowledge to instruct converted businessmen and employees on Christian values for handling ethical problems encountered in business and the marketplace so that they can exercise influence based on their faith. This article, with limited scope, will review several common phenomena related to business ethics in the mainland and a case on how the author gave advice to a Christian. It is hoped that the needs of marketplace teaching in the mainland may be appreciated by readers.

## Mainland Business Ethics Situation

### 1. Quest for Money or Values?

The pursuit of wealth is a deep-rooted desire amongst the Chinese. Many merchants are more like gamblers than entrepreneurs. They just want to earn ever bigger revenues without any vision for the future or social responsibility. Fake vaccines, fake milk powder, and recently due to the pandemic, poor quality face masks are everywhere – such scandals in the mainland created big doubts on the reliability of Chinese products. Many Chinese businessmen (some being Christians) still accept playing dirty as a business norm.

However, should Christians be so? “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” (Matthew 6:24, NIV) Christians should ponder further in their faith: manufacturers should be responsible to consumers and shoulder social costs, and should indemnify against harms caused by defective products. Jesus taught that we should pursue a valuable life. Many Christians are not poor but are short of the right values, a matter that calls for prudence in their business. Those fraudulent products and services (vaccine, milk powder, face masks) come with heavy social costs and endanger civilians. Businessmen and employees ought to start with themselves in doing what is right and must not give up their social responsibility for money.

### 2. Quest for Position or Fairness?

China has undergone forty years of economic reformation and created numerous employment opportunities, but certain culture stays put. Marketplace discrimination is common and is obvious in recruitment processes. Employers think that the female is inferior to the male in physique, intelligence and mentality. And many companies consider maternity leave as an unacceptable inconvenience or a heavy cost. Therefore, in some recruitment exercises, only the male or unmarried female is chosen. Furthermore, gender discrimination occurs in aspects of promotion, employment terms and retirement as well. Besides, there are other discriminatory practices involving age, household registration, disability, health, race, etc.

Obviously, the problem is related not only to the culture; the relevant legislation needs to be enhanced as well. We cannot expect the Chinese legal system to be raised to the standards now adopted in western countries. But as Christians in the marketplace, shall we go further? “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27, NIV). Jesus comes to set the oppressed free, proclaims justice and love, but our marketplace is full of discrimination and inequity. In a business world with fierce competition, corporate culture founded on fairness and respect should be established, in order to eliminate prejudice induced by gender differences or other reasons.

### 3. Quest for Profits or Environmental Protection?

Pollution is a critical problem in China. In particular, air pollution has exacerbated respiratory diseases among the public, impacting the cardiovascular system of the body and resulting in the premature death of a million people each year. China has become wealthy, but pollution to the environment has worsened seriously, causing big hurdles and expenses in remedial and rehabilitation measures. The costs required to protect natural resources and the environment are so high that nearly all anti-pollution measures have to be initiated by the government. The situation will get much worse if China plays down the issue. Despite the fact that the country has enough knowledge about the problem, it might not be dealt with as the number one priority.



Workers wore only simple protection gear in a heavily-polluting workshop.

What has the Bible told Christian businessmen and employees? “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’” (Genesis 1:28, NIV). Sin has separated humans from God, and as a result we treat ourselves, others and the whole world in the wrong way, bringing great harm to one another. As Christians are contemplating on operational and production costs, don’t forget the guidelines: love the Lord, love your neighbor and care for the world.

### Practices in the Marketplace

In view of these business ethics problems in the mainland, is it hard to find a way out? Christian businessmen and employees require proper teaching to help them balance stewardship in the spiritual and worldly realms. In our marketplace training course or the 4P (Profit, People, Planet, Peace) corporate training, we emphasize the holistic approach in pursuit of economical, societal, environmental protection and spiritual values. Therefore, on topics of the priority of wealth versus morals, equity in the society, and corporate accountability to the environment, we will attend to the related teachings in the Bible. Besides, we will point out the mistaken dichotomous view of the holy and secular held among Christians doing business (the problem is not just on the grey areas, but often related to seeing things in black and white). Most of the mainland churches



Chairmen of chambers of commerce and businessmen participated in marketplace fellowship sharing.

(pastors as well as believers) split work and faith, and we have to instruct them on the views in the Scripture: live out your faith, including at work.

The marketplace teaching instructor also needs to provide counselling according to students' problems, especially as they run into the grey areas in their business or vocation. We will help steer them back to the right path and make decisions in accordance with God's will. For example, in a case in eastern China, sister He is managing a dental clinic started by her mother many years ago, which grew from a single dentist's operation to having over ten dentists together with several dozen staff. But during a recent license renewal exercise, a new official pointed out that the clinic operated all along with only a single dentist's licence and could not be renewed in a different scale. The official suggested in private that she might lie about having only a single dentist in order to maintain the licence. The sister did not want to lie nor close down the clinic and affect the jobs of so many employees. Right in the difficulty, the sister who is a reader of "Marketplace Proverbs"<sup>2</sup> learnt that I was visiting the district, and caught me up for a discussion. On hearing about the problem, I made the suggestion of dividing the clinic into two, one continuing the business with the original licence and the other applying for a new licence employing all other dentists. The second clinic would also apply for a trial business permit. Though additional fees and time were involved, it turned out to be a win-win situation. The new licence was granted a few months afterwards.

The phenomena discussed above are only a few typical instances. Various challenges faced by mainland Christian businessmen and employees every day are more complicated. We hope to have more opportunities to walk with them, and assist them so that they will not stumble over ethical issues at work, but testify for the Lord with integrity and draw their colleagues to Him.

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<sup>1</sup> Reference - <http://finance.china.com.cn/news/20200216/5194915.shtml>

<sup>2</sup> In March 2016, Guan Bao and several students established the "Marketplace Proverbs" as a platform for marketplace teaching. A short article is posted every day on the web and replies are made via WeChat to enquiries from the readers regarding problems encountered in living out their faith in the marketplace.

## Prayers for Merchants and Employees in the Pandemic

During the current pandemic, a lot of mainland provinces seem to have stopped running. Patients and medical workers are the most affected groups, but businessmen and the working population also need our prayers and support:

- Pray for the business environment: as the pandemic brings about a downturn of the economy, small businesses such as catering and childcare often bear the brunt, followed by the banking, manufacturing, educational and other relevant sectors, and the repercussions are widespread. We pray that opportunities are still available to the people under impact, and that the Lord gives them the wisdom to innovate and overcome adversities.
- Pray for work conditions: a very large labor force is working in crowded factories for long intervals, which increases the risk of infection. We pray for the health and safety of workers upon resumption of factory operations.
- Pray for work prospects: when companies suffer from losses, the labor force may face work suspension and salary cut, and even dismissal from employment. We pray that shutdown and loss of jobs have minimal impact on people's living, and that companies be willing to assume social responsibilities and shoulder difficulties with employees together.

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# Putting Knowledge into Practice, Surfing against the Pandemic Tides

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The impact of the novel coronavirus extends far and wide across the entire nation. Mainland churches have suspended their meetings and ministries, the same also has happened to seminaries and bible schools. Nonetheless, pastors, ministers, seminary teachers as well as theological students are serving even more fervently.

## Gatherings withheld, Spiritual Care unceasing

Ever since the Chinese New Year, Sunday services have been suspended. Any activities that used to be held from day 1 to day 3 of Chinese New Year, such as preaching, bible studies and spiritual revival meetings, were canceled. A pastor who graduated last year noticed that as young people are spending long hours browsing updates related to the epidemic, panic, worries and even grudges are emerging. This pastor, who is serving in the eastern region, therefore initiated bible reading and prayer groups in WeChat. Group members are encouraged to read the New Testament and to pray. Upon completing the daily targets, individual group members can “check-in” to signify his/her achievement. Pastoral care can be administered through the internet. Broadcasting live or recorded Sunday services is widely implementable. Spiritual growth is enhanced further when such initiatives are supplemented by pursuant small group discussions.

Proper utilization of electronic media can help build up the mental and spiritual well-being of believers, even amid the epidemic. Unfortunately, the internet world is also full of heresies. In the northern and eastern regions, pastors have found that news on the epidemic have been intermingled with apocalyptic messages regarding the end day great tribulation. Such messages pronounce the imminence of Jesus’ second coming capitalizing on the general public’s fear and anxiety. They ask people to subscribe to their WeChat posts which intend to advance the spread their fake teaching! Pastors, on the one hand, refute the heresies by counteracting it with sound biblical exegesis, and invite believers to pray for one another and stand firm on their own faith.

## Classes suspended, Learning sustains

The commencement dates of seminaries and bible schools have been postponed time and again. Most teachers and students are still staying home. For the small number of teachers and students who have stayed on campus since the Chinese New Year, they participate in anti-virus initiatives and cleaning up of the schools. At the same time, they also undergo medical surveillance. If ever a suspected case is encountered, arrangement is made for the subject to receive treatment as soon as possible in order to minimize contamination of the campus.



“No class, yet no stop in learning” is heralded by teachers and students! In the relatively remote southwestern region, teachers and students began online tutoring. Teachers are preparing more in-depth and detailed materials to make up for the unstable internet connectivity and the reduced spontaneity of interaction in the absence of face to face contact. With such measures in place, not only is learning sustained, the growth of both parties is also uninhibited! During the suspension of classes, teachers make use of the rare opportunity to pursue their own continuing education. In the southwestern region, teacher Li is equipping himself for future classes, he is now reading the book “Listening: The Beginning of Theology” from the book gifting package. This happens to be an occasion for enhanced learning since his graduation many years ago.

## Support continues, Mutual Growth ensues

Prior to the epidemic, teachers as well as students of the graduating class were always very busy either teaching or learning throughout all 5 days of the week. On weekends, they were attending different churches to preach or to conduct practicum. At various festivals, they even had to coordinate spiritual revival meetings or leadership trainings. No end, no rest throughout the year! In the past few months, there have been increased opportunities for us to hear their inner voices. They felt rested, enjoyed being reunited with their families, and their heart and mind were reinvigorated.

While providing nurturing and care to others, we encourage pastors and believers to increase the utilization of electronic book-reading platforms. In the past few years, due to restrictions imposed upon religion in the mainland, we have specifically chosen electronic books appropriate for enhancing pastoral care and teaching to be included in the book gifting package to give to seminary graduates. During the epidemic, a pastor who serves young people made use of contents of the book “Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ” to conduct small groups with young people online. By studying the book

together, the pastor not only strengthened the foundation of these young individuals' Christian faith but also encouraged them to display the essence of being a disciple through working diligently in their daily lives.

Looking ahead, the situation of the seminaries and their respective teachers' and students' well-being will continue to be our primary concern. We will prepare pastoral care reference book packages for graduating students. Twenty-three items (15 printed books and 8 electronic books) are planned to be included in the package, ministry topics addressed include preaching, discipleship, family, church administration and leadership development, etc. The goal is to support 5000 pastors throughout the mainland.

**Please support  
"2020 Mainland Seminary Graduates Book Gifting Project"**

Fund required: USD 320,512

Books gifted: 5,000 pastoral packs, one set per graduate

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# Prayers

## 1. Invisible churches

The Coronavirus epidemic shows how fragile life is. May the Lord use churches to spread the truth when people are gripped by fear and anxiety. May more people leave sin and receive salvation and hope.

May the Lord raise up his servants to provide comfort, encouragement, guidance and blessings in families, the workplace etc. May the Lord also send believers to pray for frontline healthcare workers, keep them from being infected, and give them the power to heal the sick.



## 2. Caring for grieving children



There are reportedly thousands of people who passed away from the epidemic. The number of deaths is still increasing. May the Lord comfort families of the deceased, especially young children; may He help them cope with the anxiety resulting from their parents' sickness or death. May they experience God's love, and be spared from any attack from Satan. May the Lord send professionals / experienced pastors from

the mainland and overseas to give psychological counselling to family members, and to walk with those in grief.

## 3. Guidance for group leaders

In recent years, mainland churches have ministered through small groups, but in some remote places, where group leaders lack training and pastors are very busy, some small groups are not functioning properly. E.g. some groups have up to 50 people, and the leader plays the role of a pastor. They even have their own donation box, which reduces members' sense of belonging to their churches. Members focus more on their leader.



May the Lord give wisdom to pastors to provide proper training to leaders, and teach them about the relationship between the church and small groups, also that pastors can regularly visit the groups, provide guidance for leaders tackling group-related issues.

#### 4. Businessmen upholding Christian values



Many mainland businessmen care only about making money, ignoring social responsibility. Counterfeit products from fake vaccines, fake baby formula to contaminated foods have appeared on the market. Even during the recent epidemic, some traders use cheap ways to produce shoddy masks, without any regard for product safety, e.g. by recycling old or substandard materials.

May the Lord bring the unscrupulous businessmen to justice, raise up Christian traders / believers who uphold Christian values, change the unscrupulous business culture by being examples of not discarding social responsibility for the sake of money.

~ THE END ~

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#### **Pray for China**

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