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Choosing between God’s Will and the Law
A Study of Chinese Christians’ Dilemma over Fertility Desires and Behaviors

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1 Introduction

Religion, as one of the major determinants of fertility desires and behaviors, has increasingly attracted the attention of researchers. In China, the one-child policy that has been strictly enforced for four decades further compli-cates the impact of religious beliefs on fertility desires and behaviors. Since the 1990s, Chinese researchers have generated an abundance of economic and sociological studies about the fertility desires of the general population. These studies have focused on specific social groups, such as women in rural areas, the migrant population, various ethnic groups, the urban population, and youth. However, little research has been done regarding the correlation between religious belief and fertility. Research on fertility desires and behav-iors of Chinese Christians is nearly nonexistent in the study of Chinese reli-gion and sociology. In 2017, Li Feng 李峰 published a study on the impact of religious belief on fertility desires. Li drew upon the 2010 data derived from the Chinese General Social Survey (!,--) and concluded that religious teachings indeed directly in./uence individuals’ fertility desires. Specifically, Christians reveal a greater desire for fertility than both non- Christians and believers of folk religions.0
There is considerable international scholarship on the impact of religious belief on fertility. The religiosity hypothesis maintains that the teachings of certain religious groups have a direct impact on their believers. The social characteristics hypothesis denies a direct correlation between religiosity and fertility behavior. Instead, it proposes that the socioeconomic status of believ-
ers is the fundamental driver of reproductive decisions. The minority group status hypothesis indicates that members of a minority religious group tend to

1 Li Feng, “Zongjiao xinyang yingxiang shengyu yiyuan ma? Jiyu CGSS2010 nian shuju de
fenxi.” Shijie zongjiao yanjiu, 2017.3: 18– 34.

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impose regulations on their own fertility behavior to the benefit of the group’s overall well- being.
Although some scholars are not inclined to accept the religiosity hypoth-esis, the broader scholarship on this topic suggests that the eIfects of reli-gious beliefs on fertility desire and behavior are significant. For example, Kevin McQuillan compares the fertility rates of three diIferent religious groups and concludes that religious beliefs shape reproduction in three ways. First, a religion clearly articulates rules regarding reproductive behav-ior. Second, a religious organization has the capability and means to enforce these rules. Third, specific religious beliefs form the core of an individu-al’s identity. Furthermore, the more devout an individual is, the more likely it is that religious teachings will shape the individual’s attitude toward reproduction.J
Applying this theoretical framework to examine a house church in Beijing, which I will call Grace Church, I seek to better understand the fertility desires and behaviors of Chinese Christians. I observed Grace Church over an extended

period of time, during which I conducted interviews with the congregants, facilitated several panel discussions, and conducted surveys on WeChat. My study generated a peculiar outcome: the congregants of Grace Church demon-strate a much higher fertility desire than the national average, and yet their fertility rate is significantly lower than the national average.
This raises a series of questions: What could have caused such an unusual discrepancy between fertility desire and fertility behavior? What are the determinants? In what ways does the one- child policy, which many view as contradictory to Christian teachings on reproduction, aIfect indi-vidual Christians’ fertility behaviors? Moreover, the Chinese government ended the one- child policy and implemented the universal two- child pol-icy nationwide on January 1, 2016. How did Chinese Christians respond to this policy change? How diIferently did they react to it compared to other groups? How has their specific reaction been translated into fertility behav-iors? This chapter answers the above questions by examining the members
of Grace Church and seeking to understand the attitudes toward abortion among church leaders and congregants, as well as faith- based anti- abortion
activities.

K Kevin McQuillan, “When Does Religion In./uence Fertility?” Population and Development Review 30.1 (2004): 25– 56.

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2 The Discrepancy between Fertility Desire and Fertility Behavior

2.1 An Overview of Grace Church
Grace Church is a house church located in the municipality of Beijing. Among the 107 regular congregants (children excluded), 86 are baptized Christians, and the rest are unbaptized blood relatives. My subjects are the 86 baptized congregants. Women form the majority (68.6%) of the congregation, and the vast majority of them are in their early to mid-adulthood. Members born in the 197 0s and 1980s make up 68.9% of the congregation.
The current church leadership consists of Pastor RaoN and her husband, along with two other couples. The six- member board of coworkers makes deci-sions about church aIfairs collectively. Pastor Rao is the head of the cowork-ers. The congregation is divided into eight small groups; each is headed by a group leader and meets periodically. In addition to the Sunday service, the congregants gather for discipleship training, prayer meetings, and pre- evan-gelism groups during the week. On the whole, the connection among church members is loose at best. Over half of the congregants only attend Sunday
services.

Grace Church has never declared its denomination. According to some cowork-ers, it is nondenominational. However, considering its theological leanings, cer-tain core members of the staIf identify Grace Church with the more conserva-tive branch of evangelical churches. The church has little contact with outside groups. The pastor and coworkers of the church typically deliver Sunday sermons. In more recent years, however, the church has invited an increasing number of guest speakers.

2.2 An Unusual Discrepancy: Higher Fertility Desires vs. Lower Fertility
Rates

My interviews with members of Grace Church reveal a divergence between fertility desires and fertility behaviors. Fertility desire refers to individuals’ views, attitudes, and inclinations toward reproduction. It is re./ected in the intention to have children, the number of children desired, the sex of the chil-dren desired, and the timing of births.O Fertility desire may not be fully realized
in actual reproductive behavior for a number of reasons. The former president
of the Population Association of America, S. P. Morgan, indicates that factors

P Pseudonyms are used throughout this chapter.
Q Gu Baochang, “Shengyu yiyuan shengyu xingwei he shengyu shuiping,” Renkou yanjiu 35.2
(2011): 43– 59.

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such as the tempo eIfect, infecundity, and competition play a role in keeping the birth rate far below the level of fertility desire.R
Population studies have indicated a discrepancy between fertility desires and behaviors in developed and developing countries alike.S All the same, the divergence exhibited in Grace Church is even more striking. Though the relatively small number in our sample of Grace Church couples makes this description more anecdotal than scientific, it is relevant to note that the cou-ples’ fertility desires were higher than the national average and their birth rate lower than the national average.
Concerning fertility desire, a survey of twenty- eight congregants of Grace Church, aged between 27 and 53 years old (i.e., born between 1963 and 1989), shows that their ideal number of children is 2.37. OIficial statistics indicate that the ideal number of children for the population in the Huabei 华北 region is 1.94.T In a press release announcing the implementation of the two- child fertility policy, issued by the Beijing Municipal Commission of Population and Family Planning on July 8, 2014, oIficials state that the fertility desire of women of childbearing age in Beijing is only 1.3 children. In this regard, the ideal number of children for the congregants of Grace Church exceeds those of the Huabei population and the residents of Beijing by 0.43 and 1.07 respectively.
As to fertility behavior, the number of existing children is an important measure of fertility rates in demography. This number refers to the cumulative number of legitimate and illegitimate children, adopted children, and depen-dent stepchildren. My survey shows that Grace Church members born in the 1960s have an average of one child, and those born in the 1970s have an average of 1.06 children. (Due to late marriage and late childbearing, those born in the 1980s have an average of only 0.18 children. This is considered an aberration and is not included in my comparative study.)
According to the China Family Panel Study conducted by Beijing University in 2010, women in their thirties had an average of 1.5 children (!Up- 2010). The higher one’s age, the greater the number of children. For example, women who

V S. P. Morgan, “Is Low Fertility a Twenty-First- Century Demographic Crisis?” Demography 40.4 (2003): 589– 603.
W Alicia Adsera, “An Economic Analysis of the Gap between Desired and Actual Fertility: The
Case of Spain,” Review of Economics of the Household 4:1 (2006): 75– 95; Yang Juhua, “Yiyuan
yu xingwei de beili: fada guojia shengyu yiyuan yu shengyu xingwei yanjiu shuping ji dui Zhongguo de qishi,” Xuehai, 2008.1: 16– 22.
X Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Shehui lanpi shu: 2016 nian Zhongguo shehui xingshi
fenxi yu yuce (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2015).

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are in the 54- year- old age bracket have an average of two children.Y It is clear that the number of children of Grace Church members born in the 1960s and 1970s is far lower than that of women in their respective age groups. Another set of statistical data further corroborates the gap between the fertility rate of Grace Church and the national fertility rate. According to the estimate of Wang Guangzhou 王广州, a research fellow at the Institute of Population and Labor Economics, about 20 percent of the permanent res-idents of Beijing have excess children. Among the twenty couples in Grace Church, only one has exceeded the oIficial limit, which represents 5 percent of the married population in the church. (All twenty husbands and wives are bap-tized. I have excluded those couples in which only one member is baptized.)

2.3 Grace Church’s Exceptional Enthusiasm for the Universal
Two- Child Policy
China’s two- child policy began on January 1, 2016. From this date, the govern-ment permitted married couples to have two children. More than a year after the policy’s implementation, the response of the general population was luke-warm at best, contrary to the government’s expectation. A survey conducted by the All- China Women’s Federation in 2016 shows that 53.3% of families were not interested in having a second child. The level of disinterest exceeded 60% in urban areas.Z Tencent News (Tengxun xinwen 腾讯新闻) conducted a survey of 100,000 users, and the result was similar: only 31.4% of the partici-pants planned to have a second child.
The total number of live births in 2016 also indicates that the general pop-ulation is less than enthusiastic about the two- child policy. According to data published by the National Bureau of Statistics, there were 17,860,000 births in 2016. This was 1,310,000 more than the number of births in 2015, but it still fell far short of the estimate of the Commission of Population and Family Planning.0[
All the same, members of Grace Church are exceedingly enthusiastic about the universal two- child policy. By the end of July 2017, among the twenty- one women of childbearing age (i.e., adults under 49 years old) who had already

8 Wang Guangzhou, “Zhongguo laonianren qinzi shuliang yu jiegou jisuanji fangzhen
fenxi,” Zhongguo renkou kexue 34.3 (2014): 2– 16.
] See the December 22, 2016, report by Zhonghua quanguo funu lianhe hui, Shishi quan-
mian lianghai zhengce dui jiating jiaoyu de yingxiang.
10 Demographer Yao Meixiong 姚美雄 argued that the universal two- child policy was
apparently not well received. See her article “Ba quanmian guli shengyu dingwei xin jiben
guoce henyou biyao,” China Reform (Zhongguo gaige luntan), February 28, 2017.

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had one child, seven had had a second child, one was pregnant, two were trying to become pregnant, and one was still making up her mind. Ten women were firmly against having a second child. Some of them were concerned about their age: nine of them were more than 40 years old, and six were around 45 years old. They did indicate that they would consider trying for a second child if they were younger. Others were concerned about their own health conditions and the financial strains of childrearing. In total, 47.6% of the twenty- one women of childbearing age were planning to have a second child. Those who had had a second child and those expecting made up 33.3% of the group. This proportion far exceeds the general population’s desire to have a second child. A coworker at Grace Church was very excited about the population growth:

In the past, we would be lucky to add one child a year to the congregation. Now there are six or seven at once, and they are all second children. The children lighten us up!

The abovementioned statistical data illustrate the unusual divergence between the fertility desire and fertility behavior of the congregants of Grace Church. They demonstrate a greater fertility desire than that of the general population. Additionally, according to Li Feng’s study, the fertility intentions of Christians are on average 2.13 children, as opposed to the 1.72 for nonbelievers. These numbers indicate that not only is the fertility desire of the Grace congregation greater than that of other demographic groups, but it is also higher than that of other Christians.

3 The Distinction between God’s Will and Governmental Authority

The discrepancy between the fertility desire and reproductive behavior of the congregants of Grace Church raises additional questions. Why do they demon-strate a higher degree of fertility desire than other groups? In the interviews and surveys conducted with nearly forty congregants at Grace Church, I have discovered that religious belief is a critical determinant of both the congre-gants’ above- average fertility desires and below-av erage fertility behaviors. Generally speaking, Christian teachings encourage the congregants’ fertility desires. At the same time, religious belief is a major motivator for the congre-gants to impose constraints on and regulate their own fertility behaviors. The
end result is the congregants’ willing compliance with the laws and regulations
of the state, which leads to a fertility rate that is far lower than the national average.

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3.1 Distinguishing between Attitudes toward Reproduction and Fertility
Desires

The distinctive attitudes toward reproduction held by the congregants of Grace Church have a direct impact on their desire to reproduce. The attitude toward reproduction refers to individuals’ ideas and decisions about reproduc-tion in specific social, economic, and cultural contexts. In China, four decades of the strict enforcement of the one- child policy, as well as the promotion of related ideas, such as “over- population is a burden on the nation” or “over-population causes intense competition for resources,” have fundamentally altered the Chinese attitude toward reproduction. The traditional concepts of “oIfspring bring blessings” or “raising children to provide for old age” no longer carry much weight. Family planning is certainly the prevailing attitude toward reproduction.
My interviews with some residents of Beijing of childbearing age reveal that the notion of “continuing one’s bloodline” has been lost among those born in the 1980s and 1990s. The younger generation values personal happi-ness and individual fulfillment. Childrearing is perceived as time- and capital-intensive labor.

The congregants of Grace Church, however, do not share the same senti-ment. In fact, 80 percent of my interviewees share the belief that “children are a gift of Jesus” and “being fruitful and multiplying is God’s blessing.” Mrs. Deng, a congregant who is currently planning for a second child, expressed her atti-tude toward reproduction in terms of her religious belief:

If I were not a Christian, I would probably not desire a second child. A sec-ond child is a considerable demand on my eIforts and adds to my finan-cial burden. [To have a second child] would be asking for trouble. My friends agree with me. They encourage me to put the money and eIforts into caring for myself, updating my wardrobe, traveling, or just enjoying life. But I believe that a child is a gift from God. It is priceless, and I am willing to do anything for it.

Similarly, Mrs. Fan thinks that children are far more valuable than money or other kinds of rewards:

I believe that children are God’s blessing. In the Bible, God prom-
ises Abraham oIfspring— countless oIfspring just like the sand on the
beach— not money or other kinds of rewards. That tells me that children
are precious in the eyes of God.

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An attitude toward reproduction based on biblical teachings directly shapes the fertility desires of the congregants of Grace Church. This in./uence is clearly re./ected in their fertility intentions and number of births.
The ideal number of children for Mrs. Hu is three. She indicates that she has

never wanted children to care for her in old age. She also said:

I learned from a news report that the birth rate in the Muslim world is quite high, which leads to rapid population growth. This is quite alarm-ing. If our birth rate continues to be low, our population growth will suIfer. I am always moved whenever guest preachers encourage young Christians to have more children so that they can expand the kingdom
of God. It is a shame that the two- child policy came too late for me. I am getting old. I may not be able to have more children.

The eIfect of reproduction on expanding the religious landscape is apparent to coworker Lin, who has only one child. Born in the 1960s, she is past childbear-ing age and has given up hope for a second child.

Christians should follow God’s will and have many children. The book
of Genesis makes it clear: be fruitful and increase in number. If we don’t have more children, Muslims will fill the earth. I am useless in that department, though. Now I can only hope for grandchildren.

In addition to faith, congregants of Grace Church also desire more children because they would like to give their only child a companion. They are also concerned that a single child will be overburdened by the requirement to care for aging parents. Some simply prefer a big family. An online survey of 100,000 participants by Tencent News in early 2016 lists three major motivations for a second child: to give children a wholesome childhood, to distribute the bur-den of caring for aging parents, and to reduce the risk of losing the only child. Comparing these motivators with the attitudes of Grace Church congregants, it is clear that religious belief exercises considerable in./uence on the congre-gants’ fertility desires.

3.2 Family Planning as a Red Line
High fertility desire does not necessarily translate into comparable fertility behavior. Research has shown that factors such as cultural diIferences, state of
the economy, and employment status all contribute to the disparity between
the two. This is especially noticeable in China due to its former one- child

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policy. Prior to the promulgation of the universal two- child policy in 2016, the one- child policy was imposed on the general population.
The one- child policy was first enacted in the 1970s and was implemented throughout China incrementally. In the words of an open letter on popula-tion control issued on September 25, 1980, by Central Party authorities to Party members throughout the country, the objectives of the one- child policy were to “curb the pace of population growth” and “facilitate the realization of the four modernizations in Socialism.” Both the open letter and the subsequent “Law of the People’s Republic of China on Population and Family Planning” included distinctive language that “encouraged one married couple to have only one child.” The oIficial attitude of the Chinese government was to advo-cate for voluntary family planning. In reality, however, the one- child policy has been forcibly imposed upon the population nationwide, for understandable reasons. The one- child policy went against the fertility desires of the general population, however, and its implementation was met with various forms of resistance. The Chinese government developed four measures to enforce the policy.00
1. The government implemented a one- vote- down system at all levels of
governmental agencies. The one- vote- down system was a punitive mech-anism that denied merits and even demoted or dismissed government oIficials in a leadership role who failed to comply with the one- child pol-icy. This measure made the enforcement of the one- child policy, as well
as the penalization of its violation, an absolute priority of every govern-mental agency.
2. The state imposed a “social maintenance fee” on families with excess
births, on the grounds that they placed an undue burden on public resources. The social maintenance fee required violators to pay addi-tional fines. Provincial governments had the authority to set the amount
of the penalty. Typically, the fee was quite high, in some cases up to ten times the average annual income of the local population. In certain cases, the fee was adjusted based on the violator’s income level.0J In 2014, the renowned film director Zhang Yimou 张艺谋 was fined 7.48 million '_D (1.15 million u-F) for violating the one- child policy. This scandal also brought about a debate over such penalties, with many arguing that
this system favors the rich, for they can aIford to pay an obscene amount

11 Liang Zhongtang, Zhongguo jihua shengyu zhengce shilun (Beijing: Zhongguo fazhan chu-
banshe, 2014), 374– 377.
1K Zhan Zhongle, Gongmin shengyu quan yu shehui fuyangfei zhidu yanjiu (Beijing: Falü chu-
banshe, 2011), 160– 165.

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in fines. These social maintenance fees have placed extreme financial burdens on middle- and lower- income families. On the whole, these penalties have been eIfective in curbing the fertility desires of ordinary families.

3. Additional children could result in loss of employment or expulsion from the Party. In addition to paying a social maintenance fee, violators may also lose their Party membership or even their jobs. This is a particularly harsh punishment for employees of government agencies, state- owned industries, and state- run corporations.
4. The government would deny registration of residence for excess children. In the event that a family fails to pay the social maintenance fee, the local law enforcement can deny residency for the extra child. The consequences
of such a denial may be severe, with the unregistered child labeled a heihu 黑戶, who has no legal status. Such a person would lack access to all sorts
of social services, including education. A 2015 survey conducted by an associate research fellow at the Academy of Macroeconomic Research of the National Development and Reform Commission, Wan Haiyuan 万海远, counts approximately 13,000,000 heihu all over China. Among these, over half are excess children who were denied residency.
The media has reported other ways that the one- child policy was enforced, such as forced abortions. A woman by the name of Feng Jianmei in Shaanxi, for example, was forced to terminate her pregnancy in the seventh month. Her family was also required to attend family planning education lessons. Draconian enforcement mechanisms, together with governmental propa-ganda, have created a negative perception of the violation of the one- child pol-icy. All of these are deterrents for the fertility desires of the general population. As residents of Beijing, the congregants of Grace Church are equally aIfected by the aforementioned deterrents. Nevertheless, that does not fully explain the congregation’s below-av erage fertility rates. One may infer that Christian teachings elevate the congregants’ fertility desires. Thus, despite the deter-rence of the one- child policy, the expression of the congregants’ high fertility desires ought to be a fertility rate equal to or greater than the national average. However, the birth rate at Grace is considerably lower than the national aver-age. What other factors are at play here?

3.3 Obedience to the Guidance and Will of the Authorities
My interviews revealed a number of factors that discourage fertility desire, including the legal prohibition (the one- child policy), the overwhelming demand on time and eIfort, considerations of health, and financial situation.
An additional factor that aIfects Grace Church congregants’ fertility desires is

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religious teaching. Several congregants believe strongly that Christians should obey the government’s family planning policy and support its enforcement. In particular, Mrs. Cao is especially opposed to excess births: “A Christian’s duty is to be obedient to the authorities. If the government puts a limit on reproduc-tion, I will of course comply with state policy. It re./ects poorly on the congre-gation when our members violate the one- child policy.”
Congregant Wang shares that sentiment, saying that Christians are first and foremost members of society and are obligated to obey the law. The one- child policy, as the law of the land, is sanctioned by God despite its unreasonable demands. It is a Christian duty to submit to the higher powers. Coworker Lin used to share the above perspectives. But now she regrets that congregants did not attempt to have more children.

I didn’t used to give the one- child policy any thought. The government had its reasons to limit childbirths. Now as I think back on it, I find this policy contradictory to God’s will. I know that members of some other churches have two or three children in a family. Our congregants are obe-dient subjects and almost never violate the law. Our church teaches us well that we should submit to the higher powers.

“Submission to higher powers” is taken straight out of the Bible: “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on them-selves” (Romans 13:1– 2).
During interviews, the congregants revealed that sermons in their church put great emphasis on “submission to higher powers.” Congregants are encour-aged to consider the reputation of the church and to be able to give proper Christian testimonies by obeying the authorities. Such instruction has a direct impact on the reproductive behaviors of the congregants. They proactively suppress their fertility desires. They are even willing to resort to abortion in the event of an accidental pregnancy in order to comply with the one- child policy. For this reason, even though the congregants’ fertility desire is as high as 2.37 children, far exceeding the average of 1.3 children desired by women
of childbearing age in Beijing, their eIfective fertility rate falls far below the national average.
My interviews and surveys also indicate that the divergence between the congregants’ fertility desires and actual behaviors re./ects another dilemma. It
is the con./ict between the Christian teaching of “be fruitful and multiply” and

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the government’s one- child policy. Under most circumstances, the push and pull between the two ends may result in reproductive behaviors other than what has been observed in Grace Church. Nonetheless, because the congre-gants obey the teaching of “submission to higher powers,” their fertility behav-ior ends up favoring the government’s stance. The consequence is strikingly low fertility.
Of McQuillan’s three conditions in which religious beliefs aIfect fertility, the congregants of Grace Church meet the first condition, i.e., that Christian teachings take a firm stance on the topic of procreation. But the second con-dition is missing. Namely, the church has neither the ability nor the means to demand that its congregants carry out these teachings. Instead, the church’s emphasis on submission to higher powers eIfectively suppressed the congre-gants’ higher- than- normal fertility desires. In this way, Christian belief acts as a disincentive rather than a motivator with respect to a positive fertility rate. The third condition, that the more devout an individual is, the greater a motivator religious belief is, will be addressed in the following section.

4 Darkness in the Sanctuary: Abortions in Grace Church

Congregants with one child had been wary of accidental pregnancies prior to the promulgation of the universal two- child policy. Accidental pregnancies put congregants in a bind. One the one hand, carrying the pregnancy to term was a violation of the law, and thus an act of disobedience against the author-ities. On the other hand, the alternative, abortion, also put Christians in an impossible position. My study of Grace Church shows that several women who became pregnant by accident sought abortion with the knowledge of church leaders. In these cases, congregants chose to submit to governmental authority.

4.1 The Pervasiveness of Abortion
Four decades of strict enforcement of the one- child policy have created a top-heavy demographic structure, as the population is rapidly aging and the pop-ulation of young people is relatively small. A side eIfect is the pervasiveness of abortion. According to the annual reports of the Commission of Population and Family Planning since 1971, there have been nearly 400,000,000 cases of abortion registered with the state’s Population and Family Planning agencies.
That is the equivalent of about 10,000,000 cases per year. The total number of abortions would be even more striking if we were to take into account unregis-tered abortions and the myriad instances of medical abortion.

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In the span of three years, between 2008 and 2010, there were at least three cases of abortion in Grace Church. All of them took place after the parties con-cerned had consulted with church leaders.

4.1.1 Case 1
Mrs. Meng got pregnant by accident in 2008. At the time, she and her hus-band already had one child. They debated whether they should keep the sec-ond child. Meng was concerned about her health conditions and the family’s finances. At the same time, the couple feared the consequences of violating “submission to higher powers.” Distressed, they decided to consult with one of the church leaders, Mrs. Liu. Meng recalled their conversation as follows:

The first thing she said to me was, “Do you have a target number of chil-dren in mind?” I said no. Then I told her that if the child is the cup that God has passed onto me, I will drink from it without hesitation. I mean, the prospect of one more child and the travail and the stress that come with it all frighten me, but I am willing to endure them if the child is God’s command. To that she said, “How can you be certain that this child is a cup from God? You are pregnant because your birth control failed. When Jesus prayed at Gethsemane, the cup he spoke of referred to the cross. He took the cup to fulfil the kingdom of God. Your situation is far from that.” Her response upset me deeply. Then she asked how long I had been pregnant. I said about forty or fifty days. She replied, “You’d better hurry.” Enough said. I knew what I had to do.

Meng’s husband was overwhelmed with regret as he reminisced:

We had just become Christians at the time and were naïve. We took the church leaders’ words as the word of God, and we just followed the instruction. They made it clear that we could not violate the law. Christians cannot disobey the state’s policy. I deeply regret it. If I could
go back in time, I would defend my child with my life. No one would have been able to change my mind.

4.1.2 Case 2
Mrs. Pan became pregnant by accident in 2010. She had always wanted a sec-
ond child but never acted on it in light of the strict one- child policy. Her hus-band, a non- Christian, did not want a second child for fear of the financial strain of raising two children in Beijing, as well as the repercussions of violat-
ing state policy. He asked her to terminate the pregnancy. In addition, he was

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an employee of a state-run corporation at the time and might lose his job for an excess birth. Pan went to church leader Mrs. Liu in a state of distress.

She asked if the pregnancy was unplanned. I said yes, it was an accident. She said, “How could you two be so careless?” I felt that she was accusing me of failing at birth control, which was very hurtful. Afterward Pastor Rao also said that I should come to a consensus with my husband because having a second child is a family decision. At the time I was not only pres-sured to submit to higher powers, but I also felt compelled to submit to my husband. Pressures from both sides crushed me like a mountain.

4.1.3 Case 3
In 2010, Mr. Qiu’s wife got pregnant with their second child, even though she had an 6uF. Qiu was worried that the 6uF would aIfect the fetus’s develop-ment, and he consulted with Pastor Rao.

I recall that she didn’t give clear instructions as to whether we should get
an abortion. She said that the well-being of a new life is in God’ s hands. But I wavered; I couldn’t bring myself to entrust the matter to God. I was
so concerned about the fetus’s health that I couldn’t cope with the stress. Then I asked my wife to get an abortion.

Although the three cases vary from one another, we can see that the parties involved sought guidance from church leaders when they were distressed and indecisive. The end result for all three was an abortion. It is clear that the

church leaders’ words carried considerable weight in their decisions. The only couple that had an excess birth, however, took a diIferent route when they dis-covered the unplanned pregnancy.

4.1.4 Case 4
In 2015, Mr. Wei’s wife got pregnant unexpectedly. Instead of notifying the church leaders, Wei and his wife made a personal decision to keep the child.

We weren’t faring well financially. Our one child had put enough [finan-cial] strain on us already. We’d never thought of having a second child.
My wife was in tears when we discovered the unplanned pregnancy. I said
to her that life is precious. We must keep this child and treat it just like
we did our first one. I kept the whole thing from the church. I wanted to
follow God’s guidance and wouldn’t allow anyone’s judgement to nega-tively aIfect my wife. By law, we ought not to have the second child. The

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Bible teaches that we should carry it to term. What we did was against the law, but it conforms to God’s will. There are man- made laws and there are God’s laws, and the latter is a higher power than the former. God’s laws supersede man- made laws.

When we compare the three cases of abortion and the case of Wei, we can see that decisions were made on the grounds of the individuals’ personal attitudes toward abortion and their respective interpretations of religious teachings. There were diIferences in their responses even though they are members of the same congregation under the guidance of the same leaders. This observation by no means suggests that Wei is more devout than the others. Nevertheless, Wei seems to conform more closely to Christian teachings so far as the matter of abortion is concerned.

These cases also corroborate McQuillan’s three conditions regarding the in./uence of religious beliefs on reproduction. When the first two conditions are constant (the same Christian teachings and the same congregation), the level of devotion determines the in./uence of religious teachings on fertility behavior. The first three congregants all chose abortion, whereas Wei, the fourth case, decided to keep the second child. He and his wife are therefore the only couple in the congregation who have an excess child.

4.2 Christians’ Attitudes toward Abortion
Although Christian denominations are not unified in their attitudes toward abortion, most do share the notion that God shapes a fetus in his image and that abortion is a form of killing. A great many biblical verses also aIfirm the value of life. Take Psalm 139:13, for example: “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.”
There seems to be no consensus about abortion among the congregants and leaders of Grace Church. When I interviewed the church leader, Pastor Rao, in late 2015, she indicated that Christian churches have yet to decide whether a fetus younger than three months old should be considered human. When she was interviewed again in February of 2016, she took a diIferent position. She maintained that when both parties in a couple are Christian, the couple ought to carry an unplanned pregnancy to term, because the fetus is a life.

Several congregants have indicated that the issue of abortion has never
come up in Sunday sermons or during any other meetings. Mrs. Meng, the sub-
ject of Case 1, is very upset by her ignorance about abortion. “Back then I didn’t think of a fetus as a human. I only thought of it as a cluster of cells, not a life,
and didn’t really have feelings for it. After that, I learned more about abortion

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and read books about it. I felt very sad when I saw a tiny little lump of soft fetus that a unit leader brought back from a church in the U.S.”
My survey of a few other house churches and the Three- Self churches in Beijing also suggests that Christians have varying degrees of knowledge about abortion. Indeed, certain pastors maintain that abortion goes against Christian teachings. But in the event that congregants get pregnant by accident and run the risk of violating the one- child policy, pastors typically acquiesce to or even encourage abortions. It is also common for churches to ignore the issue of abortion at Sunday services and other church meetings. With the exception of Early Rain Church (Qiuyu Zhifu 秋雨之福教会) in Chengdu, which issued a formal statement against abortion in 2016, the vast majority of churches in China are silent about the pervasiveness of abortion.

4.3 The Rise of an Anti- abortion Ministry in Grace Church
Most churches in the United States are staunchly anti- abortion, in sharp con-trast to the Chinese churches’ general silence on the issue of abortion, on the one hand, and on the other hand their negligence in providing information about abortion to their congregants. In addition to anti-abortion advocacy , many American churches also support pregnancy help centers as an attempt to reduce the incidences of abortion. According to the director of PassionLife in the United States, John Ensor, there are nearly 3,000 church-based pregnancy help centers throughout the country, providing pregnancy crisis intervention services to pregnant women free of charge.0N These help centers have been eIfective in the prevention of abortions. According to data derived from the United States Census Bureau, in 1991, the total population of the United States was 253 million, with a total of 1.6 million abortion cases. The U.S. population in 2015 was 320 million, and the cases of abortion were 800,000. Whereas the total U.S. population has enjoyed steady growth, the number of abortions has been reduced by half over a twenty- five- year span. In Ensor’s opinion, church-led pregnancy crisis intervention has been instrumental to the decline of abortion.

Notably, an anti- abortion mission has emerged within Grace Church and other Chinese churches alike. At Grace Church, congregants who have had abortions are forming an anti- abortion group and beginning to engage in anti-abortion advocacy within the congregation. They also collaborate with other churches and oIfer assistance to pregnant women in crisis. My research has
also indicated that anti- abortion ministries are starting to emerge in churches

1P Personal conversation with John Ensor, May 2017.

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outside of Beijing, such as those in Shaanxi, Sichuan, Anhui, and Guizhou, among other provinces.

5 Conclusion

My study of the fertility desire and reproductive behavior of the congregants at Grace Church leads to the following conclusions. First, Christian belief has a positive impact on congregants’ fertility desires. During my interviews, con-gregants indicated that faith has a positive in./uence on their fertility desires, with 80 percent of the congregation believing that faith has in./uenced their desire to reproduce. This conclusion is consistent with the outcome of the !,-- 2010 survey on the correlation between religious belief and fertility desire. Li Feng’s analysis of the !,-- data also indicates that there is a direct correlation between religious teachings and individuals’ fertility desires. Believers generally have a greater desire to reproduce than nonbelievers, and Christians, in particular, show a greater fertility desire than believers of Chinese folk religion.
Second, under the dictate of “submission to higher powers,” congregants of Grace Church are especially susceptible to the state’s one- child policy. They exhibit a greater tendency to self-regulat e and to comply with the govern-ment’s guidelines. This inclination is clearly observable in the discrepancy between the fertility desires and reproductive behaviors of the congregants. Driven by religious belief, the congregants exhibit a level of fertility desire higher than the national average. Nevertheless, their actual reproductive rate is considerably lower than the national average. Only one in twenty couples had an excess birth, which puts the congregation at a much lower excess rate than that of the permanent residents in Beijing (approximately one in five couples).
The congregants of Grace Church responded promptly to the universal two- child policy, as they had to the one- child policy. During the first nineteen months of the policy’s implementation, seven out of the twenty- one women of childbearing age who had already had one child gave birth to a second child. The percentage of second births far exceeds the national average. The change
in family planning policy eIfectively released the shackles on the congregants’ fertility desires. The result was a greatly increased birth rate.
Third, the church’s guidance plays a critical role in determining how reli-
gious belief may in./uence reproductive decisions. The three cases of abortion
in Grace Church demonstrate that instructions of the church (or lack thereof),

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the leaders’ attitudes, and other congregants’ reproductive behaviors all have a direct impact on fertility behavior. My interviews reveal that the congregation never openly discusses teachings relevant to birth control or reproduction. Leaders and coworkers of the church have, however, expressed the command to obey the law, and by extension, a prohibition on excess births. They also emphasize “submission to higher powers” and comply with the one- child pol-icy by example. All of these factors negatively impact the fertility rate of the congregation.
Fourth, the more devout and Bible- oriented an individual is, the greater the degree to which Christian belief is a determinant for her (or his) fertility behavior. The comparison of the three abortion cases and the sole excess birth case substantiate this.

There are at least three topics that merit future research. First of all, my study focuses on a single church. It is worth discussing to what degree Grace Church is representative of house churches in Chinese cities. Do other churches share Grace Church’s higher- than- average fertility desire? In a society in which low fertility desire is the status quo, would people of childbearing age, especially those born in the 1980s and 1990s, share the same enthusiasm about procre-ation as the congregants of Grace Church? And how representative is Grace Church’s lower- than- average fertility rate?
Despite the church leaders’ silence and complicity concerning the issue of abortion, which is the case in most house churches (including Grace Church) and Three- Self churches, an increasing number of churches are taking a diIfer-ent approach. Pastors and congregants alike, especially those in house churches, are increasingly inclined to encourage church members not to have abortions rather than complying with state laws when deciding whether to continue a pregnancy. In a good number of churches in Beijing, it is not uncommon to find congregants with two or three children— some pastors have two children. For these reasons, it is unclear whether Grace Church is a representative case. Second, many factors contribute to the level of fertility desire, and religious belief is only one. Socioeconomic variables such as income level, education level, female employment, and the preference for sons should all be taken into consideration. To what degree do these nonreligious factors aIfect the above-average fertility desires of the congregants of Grace Church? And given the rel-atively higher- than- average fertility desire among Christians, the fertility rate
of the Christian community may also be elevated to a level that far exceeds the national average, especially after the promulgation of the universal two- child policy. The rise of anti-abortion ministries in churches may also suppress the abortion rate and further increase the birth rate among Christians.

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