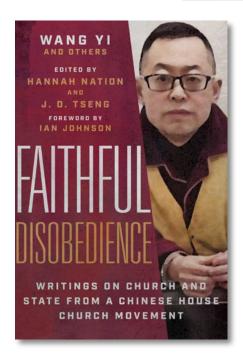
## REVIEW: Faithful Disobedience: Writings on Church and State from a Chinese House Church Movement by Wang Yi, et al.



REVIEWED BY STEPHEN STALLARD, PHD Yi, Wang, et al., Faithful Disobedience: Writings on Church and State from a Chinese House Church Movement. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022. Pp 288, ISBN: 978-1-5140-0413-5 \$28.00 paperback.



Wang Yi is a Presbyterian leader in the Chinese House Church Movement who is currently incarcerated for refusing to bow to the wishes of the Chinese Community Party (CCP). Wang Yi's physical condition is unknown. In the absence of news about his imprisonment, his voice continues to reverberate globally through his prior work.

Editors Hannah Nation (Managing Director of the Center for House Church Theology) and J. D. Tseng (pseudonym) have provided a rich compendium of primary sources to the Global Church, as it seeks to engage with the emerging Chinese urban house church movement. They share in this volume the translated works of Wang Yi and other house church leaders.

It is important to first clarify what is meant by the term "house church." In previous decades, house churches flourished in rural settings, existing as small, semi-secret churches that met in homes. Watchman Nee was an early leader within this stream of Chinese Christianity. In contemporary times, the house church has developed into new modalities. Several years ago, it was not uncommon for five-hundred members of a house church to gather in a rented facility for public worship. Modern-day Chinese house churches call themselves "house churches" not because they meet in homes, but because they want to identify themselves with a particular stream of Chinese Christianity - one marked by piety, doctrine, and dissent.





There are at least three primary strengths of this volume. First, the editors have provided a curated collection of the writings of key leaders within the urban stream of the Chinese House Church Movement. Since the dissident movement exists within an autocratic country, this book allows their voices to finally be heard by the global Christian community. Those who study the Chinese Church (whether historians, missiologists, or missionary strategists) now have a top-tier collection of primary sources to which they can turn. This alone makes the volume invaluable.

Second, *Faithful Disobedience* provides students with an example of contextual theology. Students in intercultural studies classes have heard about the concept of contextualization. In this book, they are provided with an example. Wang Yi and his colleagues engage in extensive "self-theologizing" as they describe their history, their beliefs, and their mission. Much of this contextual theology centers upon discussions of the relationship between Church and State. Indeed, in a country controlled by the Chinese Community Party, it is impossible to escape this debate.

Third, this volume is a helpful witness to Christians in the West as they continue to explore the proper posture for the Church's missional engagement in a post-Christian society. The United States, for example, is moving in a trajectory that seems more secular and less Christian. As the spiritual landscape shifts around us, many American Christians are grappling with questions of cultural engagement and mission. During the COVID-19 pandemic, questions of civil disobedience even came to the fore. The United States is a far cry from Communist-controlled China. And the situation here may never become as challenging as it is there, but American Christians would still do well to learn from Wang Yi and his colleagues, who have laid down a marker outlining the shape of a suffering, public witness.

Wang Yi likens the Church to a ballet dancer who performs in a landfill. That is a metaphor for Christian witness in Western secular contexts that are increasingly traumatized by polarization and violence. The writers in this volume point us to the cross as the paradigm for mission (currently imprisoned, Wang Yi is no armchair theorist). They call us to speak boldly and peaceably for Christ because they believe that "history is Christ writ large."

A potential weakness of the book is in its selection of sources. The American reader — cut off from the Chinese House Church Movement — could be left to wonder if this book is truly representative of the unregistered churches of China. A broader selection of authors would have strengthened this otherwise excellent volume.



Overall, *Faithful Disobedience* is a significant contribution to the fields of missiology, contextual theology, and public theology. In addition, those who are missionary strategists engaging Chinese people (whether in the mainland or in the diasporas) will benefit from reading this book. As a professor of pastoral theology, and as an interim pastor of an American Chinese church, I found this volume to be crucial and enlightening.

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