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Wang Yi et al. *Faithful Disobedience: Writings on Church and State from a Chinese House Church Movement*. Edited by Hannah Nation and J. D. Tseng. IVP Academic, 2022. 288 pp., paperback, US$28.00, ISBN 9781514004135; epub and pdf, US$27.99, ISBN 9781514004142.

In his early career, Wang Yi 王怡 was a legal expert and prolific writer, advocating constitutionalism and the establishment of civil society in China. He was baptized in 2005 and, three years later, co-founded the Early Rain Reformed Church (*Qiuyu zhi fu guizheng jiaohui* 秋雨之福歸正教會) in Chengdu, Sichuan (Early Rain hereafter).[1] As a Calvinist pastor, Wang actively engaged in Christian public witness. For instance, Early Rain held annual memorial services to commemorate the 1989 Tiananmen Democracy Movement,[2] and Wang called on the government to admit wrongdoing in covering up the massacre and to compensate the victims and their families.[3] Wang was arrested on December 9, 2018, and one year later, he was sentenced to nine years of imprisonment for "inciting subversion of state power" and "participating in illegal business operations," which referred to distributing Christian literature without permission. In 2022, IVP Academic, a Christian publishing imprint under InterVarsity Press in the USA, translated and published writings

[1] The Early Rain Reformed Church was split into Early Rain Covenant Church (*Qiuyu shengyue tang* 秋雨聖約堂), led by Wang Yi, and Early Rain Baihua Church (*Qiuyu baihua tang* 秋雨百花堂) in 2018, the latter led by Wang Huasheng 王華生. The review employs the term "Early Rain" to denote the Reformed Church prior to its division, and the Covenant Church from 2018 onwards.

[2] According to an Early Rain Telegram message, since 2009, the church has selected the time frame from May 12 (the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake) to June 4 (Tiananmen Movement) as the Prayer Month for the Nation. Fasting and prayer meetings were conducted on both days. See Telegram of Early Rain Covenant Church, accessed September 19, 2023, https://t.me/earlyraincovenantchurch.

[3] In 2009, Wang co-signed the "Declaration of Chinese Christians on the 20th Anniversary of the June 4th Incident," which denounced the brutal violence of the authoritarian regime; in 2014, on the 25th anniversary of the movement, Wang wrote a pastoral letter ("Song of June Fourth") and urged his congregation to engage with society for the sake of the Gospel. For the Chinese publication, see Wang Yi Resource Library, https://www.wangyilibrary.org/ and Facebook of Rev. Wang Yi, https://www.facebook.com/RevWangYi, both accessed September 19, 2023.

by Wang and others, concerning the church-state relationship and Chinese house churches.

With the aid of anonymous Chinese translators, Hannah Nation and J. D. Tseng (pseudonym) edited, extracted, and annotated essays authored by Wang Yi and his associates from Chinese house churches. In the wake of Wang's detention in 2018, debates have arisen surrounding the true cause of his imprisonment, with some speculating about potential human rights violations and political persecution. One objective of this translated volume is to offer a different perspective. In the words of the editors, they aim to "let Wang Yi's writings speak for themselves in English." In their framing, Wang understands that the conflict between Early Rain and the Chinese government should be primarily and predominantly seen as "a spiritual conflict" with an eschatological dimension (pp. 2–3). Whether this interpretation is accurate or not, readers are encouraged to delve into the book to form their own judgment.

The book is divided into three parts, comprising a total of 22 chapters. The eight chapters in Part I constitute half of the book and encompass translations from Wang Yi's compilation, *Our House Church Manifesto* (*Manifesto*), which features writings from three prominent unregistered churches, Early Rain, Shouwang Church (*Shouwang jiaohui* 守望教會), and Zion Church (*Xi'an jiaohui* 錫安教會). Wang composed the pastoral letter, "Why We are a House Church" (Chapter 1), after he and over two hundred house church delegates were prevented by the government from attending the third Lausanne Congress in Cape Town, South Africa in 2010.[4] In the letter, Wang affirms the path of house churches and rejects the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) based on his understanding of biblical teachings: God alone having authority over the church (Exod 20:3) and the separation of the kingdom of heaven from the rule of Caesar (Matt 22:21). Wang further accuses many Three-Self pastors and ministers of cooperating with the government to intervene in church activities and persisting in the "heretical teachings" of "justification by love" (pp. 27–30).[5] This charge is somewhat unfair, in my opinion, as Wang regards the state-sanctioned church as a whole and blurs the lines between the leaders of the Three-Self churches and ordinary congregants.

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[4] China's Ministry of International Affairs detained the delegation, citing that the congress's exclusive invitation of participants from house churches without the "legitimate representatives of the Chinese church" (i.e., the Three-Self churches) as "a rude interference in Chinese religious affairs" (pp. 25–26).

[5] The concept of "justification by love" was initially proposed by Bishop K. H. Ting (Ding Guangxun 丁光訓), the chairman of TSPM and president of the China Christian Council (CCC), with the aim of aligning with socialism ("Glossary," p. 245).

The *Manifesto* also includes contributions from three other Church leaders, apart from Wang. In Chapter 2, Jin Tianming 金天明, the former senior pastor of Beijing Shouwang Church, advocates for preserving the spiritual legacies of the house church and cautions against perpetuating its historical burdens and flaws.[6] He asserts that while house churches uphold the fundamental aspects of faith and reject aligning with the TSPM, they overlook social care and avoid direct engagement in the public arena. Moreover, house churches have long highlighted the inner life of faith and the work of the Holy Spirit, and now they also need to further develop ecclesiology and soteriology beyond individual experience of absolution of sins and rebirth. Finally, house churches demonstrate a fervor for evangelism; however, they fall short in adequately shepherding the recently established congregations (pp. 31–38).

In the essay "Tradition of the House Church in China: Nonconformist" (Chapter 3),[7] Wang Yi traces the legacy of those who rejected conformity to the TSPM in house church history, such as Wang Mingdao 王明道.[8] Asserting that the house church's fundamentalist tradition is God's grace to China and every Chinese Christian's "spiritual ancestor" (pp. 39–41), Wang goes on to argue against replacing "house church" with new terms such as "unregistered church" or "independent church," as he believes these labels would negate the historical significance and legacy of the term "house church" (p. 42). Nevertheless, Wang acknowledges the flaws of house church traditions, recognizing their isolation from the global church and the binary division between the sacred and the profane (pp. 41–42).

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[6] Pastor Jin Tianming founded Shouwang in his home in 1993. In November 2009, the police prevented the congregation from worshiping at their rented venue, prompting them to shift to outdoor worship. This was later resolved, and indoor worship resumed. Meanwhile, the church attempted to purchase its own building, but later the contract was terminated by the property owner after an initial payment of 15 million CNY. Between 2010 and 2011, the church made three unsuccessful attempts to secure rental venues for Sunday worship due to government opposition. Since April 2011, Shouwang Church returned to outdoor public worship, while Pastor Jin remained under house arrest. See website of Beijing Shouwang Church, accessed September 19, 2023, https://t5.shwchurch.org/.

[7] The essay is an excerpt of Wang's article, "On the Traditions of the House Church and the Openness of the Urban Church (Part 1 of 2)," *Human Rights in China Biweekly*, no. 16 (December 30, 2009).

[8] Wang Mingdao, nicknamed the "Dean of the House Churches," was one of the most renowned house church leaders, and his public declaration "We—For the Sake of Faith" remains a valuable spiritual resource for Chinese house churches. See Thomas Alan Harvey, *Acquainted with Grief: Wang Mingdao's Stand for the Persecuted Church of China* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002), 7–9.

In his essay "Rise of House Churches and Urban Churches" (Chapter 4), Jin Mingri 金明日, the founder of Beijing Zion Church, provides an evaluation of rural house churches and dissects the factors that have led to the emergence of urban house churches. As an illustration, rural churches have not only propelled rural evangelization, but have also fostered the gospel movement within urban churches (pp. 46–47). Jin's essay highlights two notable points. Firstly, based on his ten-year experience as a former TSPM pastor, he critiques the TSPM for being a "state-owned monopoly" ill-equipped to address the spiritual needs of this new era. Secondly, he proposes that the primary task of the house church is to define its identity and fulfil its cultural mandate. He urges house churches to seek "religious legislation" despite their illegal status (pp. 47–48).

Sun Yi 孫毅, a former elder of Shouwang, discusses the reasons why Shouwang declines to join the TSPM (Chapter 5) after the authorities demanded its affiliation with the Three-Self church as a prerequisite for registration. Sun retraces the trajectory of the TSPM's history and asserts that, by its designated function, the Three-Self church is not a church but rather operates as a religious oligopolistic entity that aids the Party and state in enforcing Party policies and overseeing Christian communities (P 56–58). As per Sun, this constitutes the fundamental rationale for house churches to refrain from participating in the Three-Self system. Joining the TSPM would consequently alter the essence of house churches, transitioning them from constituents of the universal church to components of a "Nationalist church" (pp. 61–62).

In his essay "Christian Rightists of 1957" (Chapter 6),[9] Wang Yi traces the history of Christian collaborators (e.g., Y. T. Wu 吳耀宗) and apologists (e.g., Wang Mingdao) during the TSPM and Christian Rightists in the Anti-Rightist Campaign.[10] He suggests that the curtailment of religious freedom among the Chinese Protestants from 1950 to 1956 serves as a prelude to the broader loss of freedom of thought and speech among intellectuals in 1957 (pp. 67–72). Wang argues that, "generally speaking, before 1957, the Communist Party used the Three-Self Movement to suppress the Christian fundamentalists. After 1957, the Party

[9] The essay is an excerpt, originally penned in 2007 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Anti-Rightist Campaign and the bicentennial anniversary of Robert Morrison's mission in China. It is published on the blog *Democracy in China* (*Minzhu Zhongguo* 民主中國), August 5, 2007.

[10] During the Anti-Rightist Campaign in 1957, the CCP launched the Hundred Flowers Campaign (*Baihua qifang, baijia zhengming* 百花齊放，百家爭鳴), encouraging intellectuals, thousands of Christians included, to criticize the Party, and the CCP later publicly denounced and imposed punishments on them (pp. 64–65).

used the Anti-Rightist Campaign to destroy the Three-Self Movement" (p. 88). On the other hand, while acknowledging the fundamentalists for preserving in their faith, Wang criticizes them for withdrawing from the world completely and giving up the catholic church traditions (pp. 91–92). Wang identifies with the Presbyterian evangelicals in North America, who, according to Wang, adhere to the Reformed faith, emphasize social engagement, and convey a Christian witness to the "moral, cultural, and political" spheres (p. 92).

In his pastoral letter "Raising Our Voices to End Sixty Years of Religious Persecution" (Chapter 7) Wang showcases his legal expertise and contends that while the CCP derives its authority from the constitution, the government breaches the law through its suppression of religious freedom (pp. 96–98). He encourages every pastor to speak out boldly about religious persecution and restrictions on church activities dating back to 1950, and he also calls upon the government to acknowledge its transgressions against religious freedom. The motivation behind this admonition, according to Wang, lies in the welfare of persecutors who cannot comprehend the consequences of defying God's will and compatriots who are deprived of opportunities to hear the gospel due to religious oppression. Wang sees the church's plea for restoring religious freedom not as an endorsement of the "civil rights movement," but as motivated by a determination to spread the gospel and bless Chinese society (pp. 100–103).

Wang revised this *Manifesto* in 2015, adding "Ninety-Five Theses: The Reaffirmation of Our Stance on The House Church" (Chapter 8), which were published by Early Rain in commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of Wang Mingdao's arrest due to his refusal to join the Three-Self Movement. The theses draw inspiration from the influential reformer Martin Luther and are considered by Chloë Starr to be a significant "milestone" in house church belief.[11] This document is divided into six sections, affirming God's sovereignty and biblical authority, illuminating the importance of loving God and neighbors, the Ten Commandments with the gospel, opposing any form of "Sinicization of Christianity," acknowledging the Church as the body of Christ, highlighting the separation of church and state, and denouncing the "Three-

[11] Chloë Starr suggests that it was Luther's action during turmoil that inspired Wang. For Wang, the Holy Roman Empire of the sixteenth century and the "papal authority" serve as symbols for the Chinese party-state and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Chloë Starr, "Wang Yi and the 95 Theses of the Chinese Reformed Church," *Religions* 7 (2016): 141–42.

Self Movement" and any religious interference in church affairs (pp. 104–24).

Significantly, Wang Yi and his colleagues include an extensive analysis of "the separation of church and state" in China (Theses 45–72),[12] relying on their interpretation of Romans 13:1–7 and Luther's Two Kingdom theory. They affirm that God has given the Chinese government "the authority of the 'sword'" to maintain order in society, and if the church resists this governing authority, it disobeys God (Theses 50, 53–54, p. 114).[13] It is noteworthy that Wang's previous promotion of constitutionalism and polemic stance against the state's brutality has vanished.[14] Instead, he asserts that the church is called to bear witness to its faith, and if the government prohibits the church from spreading the gospel, the church should openly criticize and oppose such restrictions (Theses 54–61, pp. 115–16). Thus, Wang restricts the church's resistance against the authorities to the religious sphere,[15] and any allegation of Wang's "anti-communist" position is both inaccurate and problematic.[16] Wang's reserved position on church-state relations inevitably diminishes the church's role in opposing dictatorship and foreshadows

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[12] It is worth noting that the Chinese compound, *zhengjiao* 政教, carries nuanced meanings. As Ying Fuk-tsang 邢福增 argues, the term *jiao* 教 can refer to either church or religion, *zheng* 政 can mean state or politics. Thus, *zhengjiao guanxi* 政教關係 includes the relationship between state and religion, state and church, church and politics, and religion and politics. In his "Ninety-Five Theses," Wang regards the church and the state as two distinct entities, delving into their relationship through the use of the terms *jiaohui yu guojia de guanxi* 教會與國家的關係 and *zhengjiao fenli* 政教分立, which are appropriately translated as "the church-state relationship" and "separation of church and state" in the IVP book. See Ying Fuk-tsang, "Dangdai Zhongguo zhengjiao guanxi tantao: Jianlun dui Jidujiao de fazhan yingxiang" 當代中國政教關係探討——兼論對基督教的發展影響 [Contemporary Exploration of Church-State Relations in China: A Discussion on its Impact on Christianity], *New Century Religious Studies* 新世紀宗教研究, ed. Wei Tse-min, vol. 2, no. 2 (December 2003): 109–74.

[13] While Wang acknowledges the right of believers to legally oppose the government when their lawful rights are infringed, he suggests that it pleases God if one abstains from physical resistance and protest (Clause 52).

[14] In his article "Making a Voice to End Sixty Years of Religious Oppression" (Chapter 7), Wang argues that the church has a duty to obey the governmental authority as prescribed by scripture, regardless of whether the society is governed by slavery or democracy, monarchy or rule of law. The church has no duty to transform any political system or to fight for human rights. Its primary purpose is to proclaim the gospel and worship God (p. 97).

[15] Wang's position reflects Luther's views on the Two Kingdoms and Christians' freedom of conscience. See Martin Luther, "On Secular Authority: How Far Does the Obedience Owed to It Extend?" In *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority*, ed. Harro Höpfl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 3–43.

[16] See Ma Li, *Religious Entrepreneurism in China's Urban House Churches: The Rise and Fall of Early Rain Reformed Presbyterian Church* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 89.

his later declaration of "Faithful Disobedience," a document penned approximately three months prior to his detention (Chapter 19, see below).

The eight essays in Part II, titled "The Eschatological Church and the City," are derived from spoken contexts, encompassing three sermons delivered at conferences and one given in the church, along with two pastoral letters and two interviews. Wang preached "The Mission and Labor Camp of The Gospel" (Chapter 9) to prospective ministers during a Chinese Mission Conference (CMC) held in Baltimore in 2013 (p. 130). He compares missions to preaching in a labor camp (p. 132) and motivates the audience to enter full-time ministry like Paul, who entered Rome under bondage. Wang states that the house church, though considered "unlawful," continues to proclaim the gospel openly and freely, mirroring Paul's unhindered ministry despite his imprisonment in Rome (p. 134). Chapter 10, "The City of God on Earth" was presented at the nationwide house church conference "Grace to City" in Hong Kong in 2014. Wang argues that the gospel extends beyond individual salvation (p. 145). He emphasizes that the gospel's transformative power should shape the church into a city established by God, thereby elevating each Chinese city to the role of a life-giving fountain and the salt and light of the world (p. 150).

In February 2018, the "New Regulations on Religious Affairs" ("New Regulations") was implemented. These regulations provided a legal framework for dissolving unregistered churches and imposing penalties on religious professionals who were not recognized by the state. Subsequently, there was an increase in government intervention in large, open house churches (p. 126). On the night of May 11, a day before the tenth memorial service for the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake at Early Rain, Wang was apprehended on charges of disrupting social order (p. 156). After his release, Wang delivered a sermon titled "The Way of the Cross, The Life of the Martyrs" on Sunday, May 13, at his church (Chapter 11). In his sermon, Wang directly addresses God, stating "You are responsible now because I can't control it anymore…I will face the almighty God alone with my conscience." He further indicates that while he neither anticipates nor evades the "test" from God (or "martyrdom"), he has readied himself for it (p. 154). Wang is convinced that the final judgment is postponed because the Lord granted the churches time until "the number of martyrs" will be fulfilled (pp. 158–59). While consistently emphasizing that he is not seeking martyrdom, Wang reassures his congregation that martyrdom adds "glory" to the church (pp. 163–64).

The essays "The Cross and the Landfill" (Chapter 12) and "Twenty Ways Persecution is God's Way to Shepherd Us" (Chapter 13) were both

pastoral letters addressed to the Early Rain congregation in 2017. In the former, Wang discusses the "eschatology of the gospel," comparing believers to the greatest ballet dancers performing at a landfill. He argues that "the more terrible the performance environment, the greater the 'eschatological meaning' of the church's show." Wang assures his congregation that the government's efforts to control the meaning of landfills will only "magnify the value of faith" (pp. 170–72). In the latter, Wang highlighted twenty "spiritual benefits" arising from the church-state conflict, the main points of which can be summarized as follows: firstly, persecution ("the cross") can showcase the immense power of the gospel and propel the advancement of the kingdom of God (p. 174, 176); secondly, persecution can purify the church and assist believers in assessing their own piety (pp. 176–77); finally, the most significant benefit is that persecution compels Christians to unite with Christ and emboldens them to declare "[Jesus] is the king," wielding its subversive power (p. 177). The two pastoral letters demonstrate that Wang has prepared both himself and his congregation for imminent suffering.

In November 2017, Wang was invited to address a conference commemorating the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation in Jakarta, Indonesia. However, he was not permitted to leave Chengdu, and his sermon titled "History Is Christ Written Large" was presented in absentia (p. 126, 179). The sermon (Chapter 14), as described by the editors, is deemed "one of Wang Yi's most important theological reflections" (p. 179). It asserts that the cross stands at "the center of history" and that Christ wields power despite Christian churches facing persecution in China. Wang provides a rationale underlying his obedience to the communist government, asserting that if believers are under the rule of the resurrected Christ and hold a genuine relationship with the Most High, it does not carry significant weight whether they are "temporarily under an unjust government" (pp. 180–82). Earthly power, while appearing formidable, cannot suppress the faith of believers or the eternal power of God, as history is Christ, not rulers, written in large (p. 184). Wang provides his understanding of the church-state relationship and proposes the coexistence of two orders in the world: the order of God and the order of Pharaoh. The latter denies "the sovereignty of God" and asserts the state as god. Wang encourages the churches to persist in preaching the gospel, living and even dying for the Lord in the spiritual battle between these two orders (pp. 186–89).

Chapter 15, "An Opportunity for Churches to Walk the Way of the Cross" and Chapter 16 "Christ Is Lord. Grace Is King. Bear The Cross. Keep The Faith" are both derived from extensive interviews with Wang

Yi in 2018. Against the backdrop of the "New Regulations," Wang contends that the churches' responses should be grounded in the gospel and align with God's will, which aims at establishing visible churches for "public worship and sacraments" (p. 192). Thus, the church should prioritize church planting rather than dividing the congregation into small groups (p. 193–94). Wang asserts that the regulations present the church with an "evangelistic and apologetic" opportunity to firmly pursue the separation between the spiritual kingdom and the worldly kingdom and resist any form of interference in matters of faith before Chinese society (P 195). Wang argues that religious persecution not only harms the church, but also unbelievers, as it reduces their opportunities to hear the gospel. Thus, the church resists persecution not for the sake of human rights or rule of law but instead for an "apologetic and missional" purpose, which would allow the church to fulfil its role as "a watchman" for the world, proclaiming the gospel to society and build a "communal life" (pp. 202–04). It is important to highlight that Wang, as a legal expert, used to be a staunch advocate of the rule of law. As early as 2006, Wang, along with four other lawyers established "Christian Human Rights Lawyers of China" to defend the rights of Chinese Christians, foster love and justice in China, and champion the rule of law in the nation.[17] Further exploration of Wang's shift in perspective will be provided below (Chapter 18).

Part III, titled "Arrest and the Way of the Cross," comprises six concise essays published in 2018. Among these essays is the joint statement "A Declaration for the Sake of the Christian Faith" (Chapter 17), which Early Rain Church released online in September as a public response to the "New Regulations." This declaration has garnered signatures from numerous house church leaders across China. The statement initially highlights instances of the CCP's abuse of power in controlling Christianity, such as the removal of crosses from church buildings and the prohibition of minors from engaging in church activities (p. 212). The document then transitions to reaffirm Christian faith, encompassing unwavering belief in the Bible, the practice of obedience to the government in "human conduct," and the commitment to maintaining the separation between the state and the church while rejecting the TSPM. The statement concludes by declaring the willingness to sacrifice freedom and live for the sake of the gospel, and it extends a call to all Chinese church leaders to co-sign the statement (pp. 213–14).

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[17] See Lian Xi, "'Cultural Christians' and the Search for Civil Society in Contemporary China," *The Chinese Historical Review* 20, no. 1 (2013): 76.

In October, two months before his arrest, Wang published "In the Face of Persecution, What Will I Do?" (Chapter 18) online, expressing his resolve for nonviolent resistance if the authorities were to intervene in "spiritual affairs" (p. 215). He firmly commits to continuing Sunday worship under any circumstances and refraining from cooperation even in the face of police violence. If detained, he plans to request the right to read the Bible and continue sharing the gospel with fellow detainees. He asserts his decision to not answer any inquiries or sign any police transcripts during interrogation, to avoid pleading guilty or making confessions on television. Instead, he will demand a public trial for his case. Upon his release, he aims to resume preaching the gospel and shepherding the church until his freedom is once again compromised. Wang emphasizes his determination to adhere to these resolutions until police brutality crushes his "health and spirit" (pp. 216–20).

As detention became increasingly clear and imminent, Wang drafted "My Declaration of Faithful Disobedience" (Chapter 19) in September and entrusted his colleagues with the responsibility of distributing it to the public in the event that he was detained for more than 48 hours. Wang affirms that his calling is to bear witness to society regarding the "heavenly, eternal life." The religious oppression in China ignites within him a passionate anger, prompting him to confront this "wickedness" through nonviolent means. Nevertheless, he maintains that his "disobedience" is driven by his commitment to faith rather than advocating for human rights through "civil disobedience." Despite the "hideous realities, unrighteous politics, and arbitrary laws" of the government, he has no interest in changing political institutions. He believes God has appointed the wicked dictators to lead people to repent. He willingly submits himself to the authorities "as though submitting to the discipline and training of the Lord" (pp. 222–24). While Wang's declaration may be interpreted as a tactic to prevent the state from finding a reason to charge him with political offenses, his notable deviation from his previous advocacy for constitutionalism and his acknowledgment of the authoritarian state's authority have surprised many of his fellow Chinese liberals.[18] I propose that Wang's acknowledgment of the state, despite his awareness of its

[18] Chow Pochung, "The Sonata of Liberalism and Christianity in China," in "Freedom and Resistance: Pastor Wang Yi and Chinese Christianity in the 21st Century," public speech at Ward Memorial Methodist Church, Hong Kong, January 19, 2020, transcription and translation mine, accessed September 19, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwoPnevKybA. See also Bai Yucheng, "One Foot Above Liberalism: Wang Yi's Search for Civil Society," in *Christian Social Activism and Rule of Law in Chinese Societies*, ed. Yang Fenggang and Christopher White (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 267.

unrighteousness, stems from his specific interpretation of Romans 13:1–7. This perspective finds resonance in his earlier writings, such as the "Ninety-Five Theses" and "History Is Christ Written Large" (mentioned above).

In addition to arresting Wang, the Chengdu police proceeded to detain Early Rain's elders, deacons, and congregants. Among them, Li Yingqiang was the final elder to be apprehended. While in hiding, just hours before his arrest, Li penned the piece "How Should the Church Face Persecution?" (Chapter 20). In this missive, he entrusts those who have been arrested to God's providence. He also encourages the congregation to find joy in the midst of suffering for the sake of the church. Li reveals the church's contingency plan in case of mass arrests. He emphasizes that Early Rain should maintain its faith statement and commitment to openness. He underscores the importance of the congregation continuing to seek communal worship, with the option of small groups as a last resort. The letter concludes with Li reaffirming Early Rain's vision: "Christ is Lord. Grace is king. Bear the cross. Keep the faith" (pp. 228–30).

Subsequent to Wang's arrest, Pastor Jin Tianming released his statement, "This Is Also Where I Stand!" (Chapter 21) on December 13 through *ChinaAid*, demonstrating his support for Wang. In the statement, Jin aligns himself with Wang's position on the church-state relationship as articulated in the "Declaration of Faithful Disobedience." This act of solidarity held particular weight as, during that period, rumours were circulating that Wang was being held on suspicion of "inciting to subvert state power" (p. 231). On December 12, the Western China Presbytery issued an open letter (Chapter 22), urging prayers for Early Rain Church. The letter details that over one hundred church ministers and staff members have been detained, while numerous church members were subjected to home surveillance, and church facilities had been closed with properties confiscated. The letter characterizes this suppression as a spiritual battle against God's children, and it encourages Christian communities to pray for Early Rain's "spiritual power" to bear witness to God. Furthermore, the letter appeals for prayers to include the police officers involved in the arrests, with the hope that they may come to understand the truth and embrace Jesus Christ (pp. 233–35).

Overall, the book shows Wang Yi's perspectives on the relationship between the church and the state, his embrace and critiques of house church traditions, his rejection of the TSPM, and his contemplation of the church's role within urban settings. The book also demonstrates Wang's responses to the implications of the New Religious Regulations

and his preparedness for potential arrest. In its entirety, this book provides a unique opportunity for global readership to delve into the theological musings of newly emerging urban churches in China. (The inclusion of a glossary and pre-chapter notes by the editors prove particularly beneficial for readers unacquainted with Chinese contexts.) I wholeheartedly recommend this book to readers intrigued by Chinese Calvinism and its perspective on the church-state relationship. As the editors suggest, it's important to approach this material with the understanding that agreement with Wang's conservative theology isn't a prerequisite for…, nor is the need to idealize him. Rather, the invitation is to engage thoughtfully with his published works.

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