

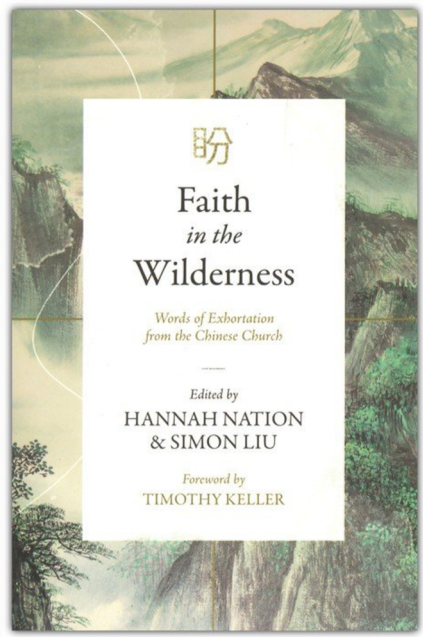
REVIEW: *Faith in the Wilderness: Words of Exhortation from the Chinese Church*

Edited by Hannah Nation and Simon Liu

ems

REVIEWED BY
AMINTA
ARRINGTON

Edited by Nation, Hannah and Liu, Simon. *Faith in the Wilderness: Words of Exhortation from the Chinese Church*. Bellingham, WA: Kirkdale Press, 2022. Pp. 192, ISBN: 978-1-6835-9604-2. \$16.99 paperback.



We have entered the era of World Christianity. This means, among other implications, that Christians around the world have the opportunity to listen to one another in a way not previously known. It is in this spirit that *Faith in the Wilderness: Words of Exhortation from the Chinese Church*, edited by Hannah Nation and Simon Liu, presents itself. Divided into three sections, Meditations on Brokenness, Meditations on Redemption, and Meditations on Hope, this collection of nine sermons from urban house church pastors in China aims to draw upon the Chinese Christian experience of suffering and persecution to offer up reflections on the same to western Christians in the midst of our global pandemic.

The opening sermon considers David who, in 2 Samuel 24, sinned by conducting a census. Upon given the choice, David asks to fall into a disaster wrought by the hand of the Lord (pestilence), which David considered a much better alternative than falling under the scope of a man-made disaster (famine or foes). China has experienced its share of disasters. China was the epicenter of Covid, and before that, SARS, but its man-made disasters have proven more deadly. An estimated 15-55 million people died from famine during the Great Leap Forward (1958-1962), and another 500,000-two million died Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) from violence, famine, and persecution.

While the book's opening sermon puts the chaos of our current suffering into perspective, the book's closing sermon points toward a peaceful eschatological future. Reflecting on Revelation 15 and the sea of glass, this sermon presents the glassy sea as

a sea of hope providing a way through the chaos of our current suffering, pointing to a peaceful future. While the metaphors for the sea in Chinese culture tend to emphasize the stormy nature of seas, on the other side, the glorious sea of glass is our hope and our peace.

Between these two bookends, however, the sermons are uneven. The house church movement in China has long had its doors closed to the Chinese government—unlike the government-sanctioned Three-Self churches—and its door wide open to western teaching, theology, funding, and influence. (As a case in point, the impetus for this volume came from a convention of Chinese house church pastors in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in early 2020 with Tim Keller as a keynote speaker.) This complex positioning is noticeable in the book itself. In particular, the sermons in the first section—Meditations on Brokenness—stressed penal substitutionary atonement, the reality of hell, and a guilt-justice paradigm of righteousness, making the volume at times read more like mid-last-century American fundamentalism than an engagement with Chinese realities.

In sum, while containing some thoughtful meditations, those wanting a dialogue of Christian theology with Confucian or Daoist thought—both still strong in contemporary China—will need to look elsewhere. *Faith in the Wilderness* is less a work engaging Chinese culture, and more a work of global Reformation theology.

Aminta Arrington