

REVIEWS & RESPONSES

Review: Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Reformation Heritage Books, 2012). ISBN 978-1-60178-166-6. Hardcover, 10 x 7, 1,060 pp. \$60. Reviewed by Carl R. Trueman, Professor of Historical Theology and Church History, Westminster Theological Seminary.

The impact of Puritanism on historic and contemporary Reformed theology has been immense. Whether direct, through the writings of the Puritan authors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, or mediated via the work of later figures, such as the Victorian preacher C. H. Spurgeon or more modern figures such as Martyn Lloyd-Jones and J.I. Packer, Puritan theology has been a significant resource for the church.

Nevertheless, the questions of how best to approach the Puritans and how best to use them are significant. Given the broad chronological sweep of Puritanism (roughly from the mid sixteenth to the late seventeenth centuries) and the frequent verbosity of the authors themselves, the neophyte can find reading the Puritans to be a daunting experience.

Given this, the present volume by Joel Beeke and Mark Jones is an attractively produced work which offers both the novice and the experienced reader of the Puritans an excellent survey and synthesis of Puritan teaching. The authors know the Puritans well and also have the gift of summarizing and communicating complicated ideas in lucid prose.

The work is set forth as a type of comprehensive dogmatics arranged in classical manner under a series of topical headings which move from the theological foundations to praxis: Prolegomena; Theology Proper; Anthropology and Covenant Theology; Christology; Soteriology; Ecclesiology; Eschatology; Theology in Practice. Each section is subdivided into subsections which explore in depth key aspects of the overall topic in hand. Thus, when discussing "Theology Proper" there are some general subsections (e.g., "The Puritans on Providence") but also a number focused more narrowly (e.g., "John Owen on Communion with the Triune God"; "Thomas Goodwin and Johannes Maccovius on Justification from Eternity"). Each essay offers both a good analysis of the topic in hand and provides a good basis for further reading.

This approach is helpful. 'Puritanism' is itself something of a construct. Scholars still debate whether it is to be considered primarily an ecclesiastical movement, focused on achieving a more thorough reformation of the Church of England than that offered by the Elizabethan settlement, or whether

it should be regarded as representing a strand of experiential Calvinism. That particular debate is unlikely ever to be resolved on one side or the other. The movement, such as it was, embodied both elements and individual Puritan theologians can be located in either or both camps. The situation is perhaps further complicated by, for example, later New England churchmen such as Jonathan Edwards as a Puritan, and by Lloyd-Jones's tendency to refract Puritanism through the lens of eighteenth century revivalism. Thus, anyone with a strong experimental Calvinist piety and a basic dislike of Anglican church order became, for the Doctor, a Puritan, and it is perhaps this definition which has crept into popular church parlance.

This volume avoids the complexities of such debates and reception by focusing primarily on Reformed theologians (mainly English, but some Scots, Dutch and New Englanders) of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and by allowing that even within this relatively focused selection, there was a fair amount of diversity. Recent scholarly analyses of Reformed Orthodoxy has shown that it possessed both a basic confessional coherence and, within this a significant amount of diversity. This volume is excellent at demonstrating that this basic model holds when discussing Puritan theology. It also helps to bridge that divide which, until recently, hindered studies of Reformed Orthodoxy: the separation of Puritan studies from those dealing with continental patterns.

A number of sections are particularly noteworthy. The section on the covenant of redemption is excellent. What is clear from the study of seventeenth century Reformed Orthodoxy is that systematic theology must have a speculative dimension. It is not simply biblical exegesis but rather stands within the wider tradition of theological reflection going back through the Middle Ages to the patristic era. It is biblical exegesis in dialogue with prior dogmatic formulations and contemporary challenges which drive further dogmatic formulations. Like the Chalcedonian Formula, the covenant of redemption does not simply fall off the pages of scripture; it is the result of the careful co-ordination of Trinitarian and Christological concerns with the overall schema of Reformed soteriology. Far from being a piece of speculation (as, for example, Karl Barth seems to have regarded it), it is an appropriately speculative construct which makes best sense of scripture's teaching in a number of areas and provides a solid conceptual foundation

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for Christ's work as mediator. It has a specific linguistic history in the rising consciousness of covenant language in the 1630s, it connects to Christological concerns, and it operates as a means of grounding the covenant of grace within the Trinitarian life of God in eternity. In this, the authors are particularly helpful in showing how the Spirit came to be integrated into the basic model, thus obviating one standard criticism of the covenant of redemption, that it is essentially binitarian in its underpinnings.

The sections on law and gospel and on union with Christ are both important. In contemporary Presbyterianism, there are streams of thought which seem to attenuate the third use of the law and downplay or reconfigure sanctification in a manner which is sometimes self-consciously pitted against Puritan theology. The contemporary issues here are too numerous to raise and scarcely relevant to a review of a book of historical theology, albeit one pitched with practical contemporary purpose. Yet the historical analyses of Beeke and Jones seem on the whole sound and so one is left wondering about why these matters are now so contentious within the confessional framework which the Puritans did more than anyone else to establish. Both legalism and antinomianism are to be rejected and, on the whole, that appears to be what the best of the Puritans as represented here did.

The authors' refusal to allow generalizations to lead to over-simplist conclusions is nowhere more evident than in the section on John Owen and the Sinaitic covenant. Describing Owen as presenting the 'minority report' on the issue, the authors offer an account of his views which set them apart from the more typical Puritan approach which saw a basic twofold covenant structure to the history of redemption (works and grace) and also the trichotomous approach of the School of Saumur. The chapter's analysis is ultimately inconclusive but this is, I believe, a fair result based upon the evidence. As an aside, one of the trickiest matters for any intellectual historian, is judging between what represents a change of mind, what represents a mere change or infelicity of expression, and what represents a simple inconsistency or self-contradiction. That issue can be acute when one is dealing with a body of work of the size of that by John Owen and the modesty of the conclusions in this section are appropriate and, indeed, a model to follow.

In closing, I would offer three closing comments. The first is that the Puritans deserve a wide reading today. The Reformation of the sixteenth century transformed the theological and pastoral landscape. The result was that the new theology raised pastoral questions which it was not immediately able to answer in a fully satisfactory manner. Thus, once assurance became an assumed norm of the Christian life, then pastors had to start addressing for the first time how to handle Christians who wrestled with lack of assurance. More obviously,

the implications of justification by grace through faith would take time to be fully realized in a pastoral context. The Puritans, or at least the Puritans of the seventeenth century, represent men who were able to reflect on these issues from the vantage point of nearly a century of Protestant theology in action. Thus, they were, and indeed remain, perhaps the most important pastoral theologians of the long Reformation. Like Chrysostom before them, they thus offer to the pastor today an important historical resource for reflecting upon the nature and the tools of pastoral ministry from a time before the therapeutic or the business models had come to dominate.

Having said this, my second point is a qualification of the first: there is always the danger that a volume such as this can create the impression that all that is needed in the contemporary church is a return to the Puritanism of an earlier era. Certainly, the Puritan authors have much to offer the modern church, not least a Godward focus and an emphasis upon serious piety. Yet we must beware of their limitations. Their exegesis is often not as precise as one would expect today and their grasp of redemptive history lacks the nuance of later writers. Further, we must beware of the appeal of what we might call the 'Puritan aesthetic,' where a kind of nostalgia leads us to mimic the language and concerns of the seventeenth century as if that era was somehow intrinsically more faithful or godly than our own. The church then, as the church now, had undoubted strengths but also serious flaws and limitations. One does not have to be a radical feminist when looking at Richard Baxter's *Christian Directory* to be reminded that the seventeenth century was, for example, very much a man's world and that something as basic to pastoral ministry as marriage counseling is probably best not pursued along some of the lines proposed by the Puritans. Yes, we need Puritan theology and practice but we need it in a form which is comprehensible to Christians in the present day. That involves supplementing our reading with works of later theologians, indeed of contemporary theologians, in order to minister effectively today. Obviously, the authors have no intention of this being the last theological or pastoral word on any matter but it is a caveat worth noting in any case.

Third, in a more positive manner, this book is a reminder that confessional Reformed theology was formulated by men, many of whom placed a high value both on religious experience and on sanctification. This is not to say that 'one size fits all' was the order of the day on these issues but it is to say that, given current intra-confessional debates, it is odd to find that the term 'Puritan' can be used as a pejorative even within the walls of confessionally Reformed churches, as if such were theological cuckoos in the nest. Puritanism in not sappy mysticism or a trumping of head by heart. Mere concern with or reference to religious experience or practical godliness does not make one guilty of such, as any cursory

reading of the letters of Paul should reveal. Puritanism's best exemplars—Owen, Goodwin, Watson and company—bound the two sides of the Christian coin together with considerable rigour and biblically informed acumen. Owen's work on mortification, for example, remains a superb treatment of sanctification in theology and experience, and also still stands as one of the best practical works to give people struggling with, for example, that most modern of pastoral malaises, the use of internet pornography. Confessional Reformed theology, of which much Puritanism was a part, made room for precisely such practical concerns.

Further, this book demonstrates the breadth of Puritan theology, a breadth reflected in the catholic vision of the Westminster Assembly, against the background of which we should read the Westminster Standards. Eccentric exclusion of experiential Calvinism from Reformed theology is both unhistorical and unhelpful. True confessionalism is eclectic because the confessions of the faith were consensus documents which spoke to a framework of specific non-negotiables while leaving room for maneuver on some doctrinal specifics (supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism, for example) and significant space for diversity on matters such as Christian experience. The danger is always to make our aesthetic preferences or sub-confessional convictions the norm for the whole church: this volume is a helpful reminder that on many issues Puritanism offered a variety of perspectives which were not seen as jeopardizing or disrupting fundamental unity.■

Review: John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2013). 1219 pages. Hardcover. ISBN: 978-1-59638-217-6. \$49.99. Reviewed by Wes Bredenhof, Th.D., Providence Canadian Reformed Church, Hamilton, Ontario.

Having written many other books and articles, John Frame has become rather well-known in Presbyterian and Reformed circles. According to the preface, his friend and editor John J. Hughes encouraged him to undertake the writing of a systematic theology. His goal was to be clear, cogent, and above all, biblical. The first twenty pages contain numerous endorsements from various seminary leaders, pastors, and professors. Most of these endorsements laud Frame for having achieved his goal. Unfortunately, for this reviewer, this has only led to an increased cynicism about endorsements. There are numerous significant concerns about Frame's *Systematic Theology* which will lead to a mostly critical review here.

Still, the words of Philippians 2:8 always weigh on my mind as I prepare a book review of this nature. I do want to look for what is pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and so on. If an author has made a helpful contribution to Reformed theology

in some way, we should be prepared to draw attention to it and give credit.

There are important areas where Frame hits the mark with clarity and cogency. For instance, in chapter 26 he has a lengthy and solid defence of biblical inerrancy. He explains the biblical basis of inerrancy, discusses the relation between precision and error in Scripture, outlines some of the necessary qualifications of inerrancy, and addresses objections to inerrancy. If I were looking for a concise biblical treatment of this vital topic, I would turn to Frame.

Another excellent discussion deals with the problem of evil (chapter 14). This falls in the range where Frame is at his best: topics directly relating to apologetics. Especially helpful is Frame's engagement with the notion that evil is a privation. He correctly notes, "Moral evil is sin, transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4). Scripture does not speculate whether or not these evils are 'being' or 'nonbeing' or where they fit into the metaphysical structure of the world" (289). Following Cornelius Van Til, our author correctly maintains that sin should not be depersonalized by simply reducing it to metaphysics.

When it comes to the doctrine of creation, *Systematic Theology* has some argumentation in favour of *creatio ex nihilo*. There is also a lengthy discussion about the length of the creation days. Unfortunately, at the end of the discussion, Frame begins to waffle, he says that he does not have any view on the matter that he could argue with confidence (196) nor does he wish to make a literal six-day interpretation a test of orthodoxy (199). When it comes to the age of the earth, he thinks that the exegetical evidence favours a young earth, but he does not have "much scientific training, aptitude, or knowledge" and so his conclusions are necessarily inadequate (199). Upon four persuasive grounds he categorically rejects the theory of evolution (202–203), but consistency would seem to dictate the same kind of vacillating position that he took with regard to the age of the earth. If one does not have the scientific training, aptitude, or knowledge to make firm and adequate conclusions about the age of the earth, how can one be so dogmatic about the theory of evolution?

That leads into more concerns. Surveying the Table of Contents reveals a notable imbalance in the *loci*. More than half of *Systematic Theology* deals with theology proper and bibliology (which, by some accounts, is more appropriate for prolegomena). There is extensive treatment of topics that Frame has written on in the past, but other subjects receive superficial attention. As an example, one might debate the appropriateness of including ethics in a systematic theology text, but there it is in chapter 52. Under the heading, "The Lord's Commands", Frame treats the Ten Commandments in two tiny paragraphs comprising a mere 120 words. Yet we have part 5 "The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God", which expounds epistemology over four chapters, even as the author

acknowledges that this topic is technically a philosophical discipline (704). It seems that it gets included in this volume simply by virtue of the fact that the author has written extensively on it elsewhere in the past.

Methodologically, anyone acquainted with Frame's other writings will find themselves in familiar territory. He has developed a tri-perspectival approach to theological and philosophical matters. For instance, according to the glossary a perspective "is a view or study of an object from a particular angle" (1127). Frame's perspectives divide into categories of normative, situational, and existential. They are typically illustrated with a triangle. Frame calls them "triads" and he finds them everywhere. These triads are sometimes interesting, at other times confusing, and still at other times lead to theological trouble. The most egregious example is found in his treatment of the Trinity. While I have no reason to doubt Frame's orthodoxy regarding the Trinity, his commitment to the tri-perspectival approach could leave him looking like a modalist. On page 507 he only suggests a tri-perspectival model for understanding the Trinity and we can gladly note that he resisted the temptation to illustrate with a triangle. However, over in Appendix A we find a chart of triads discussed in the book and among them are "Father, Son, and Spirit" with the Father being the normative perspective, the Son being the situational, and the Spirit being the existential. A modalistic danger lurks with the presentation of the divine persons in terms of perspectives, especially as defined in the glossary and quoted above.

In the preface, Frame states that because he wants to be biblical his book is "somewhat less historical in focus" than other systematic theologies. This is actually a good thing, since there are several places where this volume falters on historical matters. For example, in a footnote he insists that Martin Luther questioned the canonicity of James because of a perceived conflict with Paul's doctrine of justification (589). Yes, Luther described it in his Preface to the New Testament as "an epistle of straw" and yet he included James in his German Bible translation. Moreover, Luther actually preached on James as the Word of God. The fact of the matter is that Luther's comment had nothing to do with canonicity—it was more about the relative value of books within the canon. Of course, Frame is not the first to make this sort of claim, but it reveals a lack of nuance on his part. Something similar happens with Ulrich Zwingli. He writes that Zwingli was so radical about emphasizing preaching that he excluded music from public worship (647). This is another popular misconception and Frame gives no source to support his claim. As Gottfried

Locher has convincingly demonstrated, what Zwingli really rejected was chanting in Latin.¹ Other examples could be added.

Some might be willing to give this book a pass on historical matters so long as we find a trustworthy handling of the Scriptures. Unfortunately, here also things sometimes fall short. I have collected a number of examples, but will only share three. In two places (106 and 976), Frame repeats the popular (but erroneous) view that the Aramaic word *abba* means "daddy."² Chapter 13 has a discussion of God's righteousness in which Frame includes a lengthy quote from Psalm 34:15–22 and then comments: "The 'righteous' here are not sinlessly perfect, but they are *tamim* ('relatively perfect,' 'upright')" (263). However, the Hebrew word *tamim* is not used anywhere in Psalm 34 nor is "relatively perfect" a meaning of this word that could be found in any lexicon. The quotation marks suggest some source, but Frame does not provide it. As a final example, Frame quotes at length from Psalm 1:1–3 and then comments, "The word for 'meditate' there refers literally to an animal chewing its cud, over and over again" (1049). This is simply incorrect. The Hebrew word for meditate in Psalm 1:2 is *hagah* and it literally means to mutter, coo, or growl. No lexicon has any reference to cud-chewing.

Now we come to some of the significant theological concerns in Frame's *Systematic Theology*. There are quite a few of them, but I will restrict myself to several of the most serious. At several places in this volume Frame seems quite intent on defending his friend Norman Shepherd or at least mitigating concerns that have been expressed about Shepherd. He has taken over some of the language of Shepherd in regard to human responsibility in the covenant. For example, "...human beings receive the blessings of the covenant through obedient faith" (29). "Obedient faith" is an expression Frame uses quite frequently and one which results in blurring or conflating the essential distinction between antecedent and consequent conditions in the covenant of grace. The antecedent condition is a true faith which unites one to Christ and all his saving benefits. The consequent condition is the fruit of faith and union with Christ in a growing, holy obedience to God's law. Frame, following Shepherd, disregards this distinction.

In two separate places, Frame discusses Shepherd's rejection of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ. To his credit, our author insists that he does not agree with Shepherd on this point. However, he makes two further statements that warrant concern. In a footnote in chapter 38, he maintains that Shepherd is "certainly within the bounds of Reformed orthodoxy" (902). However, who determines what those bounds are? Are not those bounds determined by the confessions of the church? And when ecclesiastical assemblies have ruled certain views out of bounds, does that count for nothing? Later, in his discussion of justification, he argues that the Reformed confessions have not been unanimous on this

1. Gottfried Locher, *Zwingli's Thought: New Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 61.

2. For a scholarly refutation of this view see: James Barr, "Abba isn't daddy," *Journal of Theological Studies* 39.1 (April 1988): 28–47.

issue and, moreover, “Shepherd appeals to the earlier confessions, those of the sixteenth century” (975). It seems that this reference is to the Three Forms of Unity. However, as Nicolaas Gootjes has demonstrated, the Belgic Confession clearly affirms the imputation of the active obedience of Christ. Prior to the Synod of Dort 1618–19, this had been a disputed issue. However, the Synod revised article 22 of the Belgic Confession to shore up this doctrine, thus recognizing it as an essential doctrine of Reformed orthodoxy.³ Contrary to Frame, denying this doctrine does in fact land one out of bounds.

Frame’s problems with the church’s confessions are far-reaching. Chapter 27 features one of the weakest and most disappointing discussions in the book. He argues that “the use of creeds and confessions to maintain orthodoxy in the church must be regarded as an optional method of protecting true doctrine” (654). According to Frame, Scripture does not require the church to have confessions. This is a highly contestable assertion.⁴ Moving on from there, we learn that it is Frame’s judgment that “there should be no confessional requirement for church members” (654). None at all? How can there be any true unity in the church apart from doctrinal unity? Moreover, Frame believes that strict subscription for church officers violates the sufficiency of Scripture. He opines, “...strict subscription guarantees that the confession will never be reformed according to the Word of God” (656). Historically speaking, this is categorically incorrect. In the previous paragraph, I noted how in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands the Belgic Confession was revised by the Synod of Dort in 1619 to bring it more in line with the Word of God on Christ’s active obedience—and this was in a time of strict confessional subscription. Moreover, churches which hold to strict subscription (as mine does) have definite ecclesiastical processes in place for officers who might develop scruples on certain points in the confessions. Frame’s arguments against strict subscription amount to beating down a straw man. Certainly, as we will see momentarily, he has a vested interest in maintaining only a very loose subscription. The result is that Frame’s *Systematic Theology*, while it appeals to the Reformed confessions when convenient, is not completely bound to those confessions. If being rigorously confessional is an essential part of being Reformed, Frame’s book is sadly somewhat less than Reformed.

There is a bizarre conclusion in chapter 46 regarding church government. Frame briefly discusses the different options: Presbyterian, Episcopal, or Congregationalist. He concludes, “In my judgment, Scripture doesn’t teach us clearly that one of these is right...” (1027). However, he then proceeds to argue that “these three forms of government reflect concerns that parallel my three perspectives” (1028). He goes on to present these three as a triad, complete with a triangle illustration. He says that this is a possible model, but a model of *what?* It

seems to this reviewer that it only models a sort of relativistic thinking when it comes to church polity, a model completely foreign to the Reformed confessions. How is it that a book written by a Presbyterian minister expresses apprehension regarding whether Presbyterianism is the church government taught in Scripture?

When we arrive at the topic of eschatology, again we hear a brief discussion of the three alternative views of the millennium mentioned in Revelation 20:1–8. One half expects the result of this discussion to be another triad: pre-millennialism, post-millennialism, and a-millennialism. Maybe these are all perspectives too? Somewhat surprisingly, our author does not go there. He professes much uncertainty on the topic but says that he leans towards the postmillennial view.

Let me finish my theological concerns with a comment about the regulative principle of worship. In 1996, Frame published *Worship in Spirit and Truth* and many reviewers soon noted his badly mangled formulation of the regulative principle—a formulation which essentially amounted to a negation of the principle. Suffice it to say that the concerns have not been alleviated by his *Systematic Theology*. This is one of several places in the book where there is an explicit conflict with the Reformed confessions. This quotation about teaching in worship should say it all: “Nothing in 1 Corinthians 14:25 prevents us from considering any method or style of teaching that is consistent with biblical principles and that is educationally (i.e., edificationally) valuable, such as, perhaps: children’s sermons, or sermons given to other age groups; object lessons; teaching through music or drama; visual aids; personal testimonies; fielding questions” (645).

Systematic Theology was often an aggravating read, but it was made more so by a myriad of editorial and publishing blunders. The book is over 1200 pages, but a significant portion is the result of bloat. Did the publisher really need to include 20 pages of endorsements? Louis Berkhof’s ST is still in use today and it features exactly zero. Frame’s book includes both a Table of Contents and an Analytical Outline. Could these not have been merged? Frame often provides unnecessary and lengthy quotes from Scripture, some with no explanation or elaboration. About 50 pages of this book are comprised of the full text of Scripture memory passages, unnecessary when references would have sufficed. Finally, there is a lengthy glossary of Frame’s own special terminology (which he prepared for his own *festschrift*)—many of the terms are not even used in this volume. By my count, there are at least 100 pages of unnecessary and unhelpful material. There are several more editorial matters that could be mentioned, but let me leave it at that.

3. Nicolaas Gootjes, *The Belgic Confession: Its History and Sources* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 151–152.

4. See the arguments in Carl R. Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2012).

In sum, John Frame's *Systematic Theology* is representative of the man's theological labours to this point. Occasionally there is something worthwhile on offer, but more often Reformed theology students will be better served looking elsewhere. This is especially because this book only selectively conforms to the Reformed confessions. A moment ago, I mentioned Louis Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*. First published in 1939, it is still widely recognized as a generally faithful synopsis of Reformed theology. The same cannot be said today of Frame's ST and probably will not be said 75 years from now. ■

Review: N.T. Wright, *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978–2013* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013). 620 pages. Paperback. ISBN-13: 978-0-80069-963-5. \$69. N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013). 1660 pages (2 volumes). Paperback. ISBN-13: 978-0-80062-683-9. \$89. Reviewed by Rev. Lane Keister, pastor of Lebanon Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Winnsboro, SC.

The possibility of engaging in one book review the vastness of Wright's writings on Paul in just these volumes is non-existent, never mind all his other works. We will have to content ourselves with general statements about the features of Wright's work illustrated with a few specific examples. While these volumes are certainly very important in discussions of Pauline theology and contribute some positive things to our understanding of Paul, as a whole they are poor guides to the theology of that apostle.

N.T. Wright is a colossal thinker. He paints on the largest possible canvases. He is a big-picture person. This is one aspect of his work which makes interaction rather difficult, since one really has to see his theology as a whole before one can engage with it. In fact, one of the largest criticisms that this reviewer has of Wright's work in this regard is that it is so excessively big-picture that he loses sight of the trees for the forest. He winds up imposing a narrative grid on Paul everywhere and explicates that narrative. This process is evidently what he thinks of as exegesis.

We will start, then, with his understanding of what Paul is doing as a whole. He says this any number of times in *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (hereafter PFG). The narrative goes something like this: after Adam fell into sin, God chose Abraham and the people that would come from Abraham to be a blessing to the nations, thereby fixing what Adam broke. The problem with Israel, however, was that the Israelites were in Adam and were just as fallen as Adam was. Therefore they were not able to fulfill their calling to bless the nations. During the time of the Old Testament, then, God was gathering

up sin into one place (Israel!) through the law, so that the God of Israel could deal with sin permanently in the promised Messiah. Jesus is that promised Messiah. In Him the story of Israel reaches its climax. In Him, God is faithful to the covenant promises that He made. This explains the title of the work: the way in which God is faithful is through the Messiah, by Whom and through Whom God is putting the world to rights.

Paul's reflections on this story center on three main concerns: monotheism, election, and eschatology, all of them re-imagined around the Messiah Jesus. Paul is a thoroughly Jewish thinker (though he interacts with non-Jewish thinkers as well) in terms of the starting categories just mentioned. However, he re-imagines these three categories to take into account Israel's Messiah Jesus. For instance, Paul quotes the Shema only to include Jesus right in the middle of it. Wright concludes that Paul was redefining Israel's God away from the normal Jewish definitions, in order to include a Trinitarian viewpoint. In terms of election, Abraham's people are redefined as those belonging to Christ, the one true and faithful Israelite. The new way of being Israel is belonging to Israel's Messiah (Wright sharply rejects all forms of supersessionism). Eschatology means the hope for the future (already begun in the famous tension of the already and not yet) that the entire creation will be reconciled to the Creator. This has begun in Jesus and will reach its consummation in the new heavens and the new earth.

It should be obvious to Reformed readers that there is actually quite a lot of this big picture with which we can agree. And, in the process of agreeing, there is much we can learn from Wright. For example, his treatment of Philemon which starts PFG (and I am fairly sure that Wright is the first and only scholar to date to begin a theology of Paul by exegeting Philemon) is incisive and helpful on many points.

The format of PFG is chiasmic. Parts one and four deal with the same topics, the first considered *a priori*, and the fourth *a posteriori* (and in reverse order). These flanking parts consider Paul's relationship to the world in which he lived and the various contemporary contexts (Roman, Greek, Jewish, and religious). Part two has to do with Paul's worldview. Part three is the heart of the volume, taking up 660 pages (by far the largest chunk), this being Wright's account of Paul's theology distributed into his three guiding categories of monotheism, election, and eschatology.

The volume *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul* (hereafter PPEOP) has a much simpler organization. It is a chronological collection of N.T. Wright's essays on Paul spanning the years 1978–2013 (33 articles total). Some of these essays are more historical in nature, such as chapter 1 ("The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith"). Some are more theological, and some are more exegetical. Of the latter, there are some essays

dealing with an entire letter of Paul (his treatment of Galatians is an example), and there are others that treat specific passages. All of them are interesting to read, as Wright has an engaging writing style and is very witty as well.

It is not quite as enjoyable when Wright turns his guns on Reformational readings of Paul. Sometimes he says that if you accept his [Wright's] views, you get everything the Reformation wanted and more. Other times he says that the Reformation got it wrong. Unfortunately, Wright usually gets the Reformers wrong. He never quotes an actual Reformation author when he makes (usually quite sweeping) denunciations of their views. For example, he accuses Reformational authors of equating justification with conversion (or regeneration) numerous times in this book (pp. 36, 215, 221, 284, 308, 342 of PPEOP). This may be true of some popular level quasi-Reformed theologians, but not of the serious ones. It makes one wonder if Wright has ever read any Reformed systematic theologies. This impression becomes stronger when Wright makes one of the most egregious historical mistakes of his career. He says, "The tradition [he means the Protestant tradition, LK] has used 'justify' and its cognates to denote conversion, or at least the initial moment of the Christian life, and has then debated broader and narrower definitions of what counts" (PPEOP, 284). He follows this up with another caricature of dogmatic theology on page 285: "I note, as a point which much dogmatics has yet to come to terms with, the fact that both Paul and John the Seer place great emphasis not just on being saved, not just on being raised from the dead, but on sharing the glorious rule of Jesus Christ as Lord over God's new world." It appears that N.T. Wright is a great deal more cautious and charitable when dealing with Second Temple Jewish literature than when making these sweeping (and mostly false!) accusations against a body of literature that there is little to no evidence he has ever read. One wonders how in the world Wright can advocate people moving beyond the so-called "old-perspective/new-perspective divide" (see PFG, pp. 1513–1514) if he repudiates most of what the Reformation actually held on the subject of justification. What he proposes is that readers ignore the old perspective on justification, pick up his version of the New Perspective view on justification, and integrate everything else along with it.

A second major problem with Wright's work is his lack of encyclopedic integration. What I mean by this is an integration of all the theological disciplines: exegesis, church history, systematic theology, and practical theology. There is some exegesis (with the qualifications noted above), and there is theology that is purported to be based on the text of Scripture. There is almost no church history, and certainly no systematic theology. Now, Wright's aims in PFG, for instance, are almost entirely historical. However, Wright engages with

many recent interpreters of Paul, and he explores Second Temple Judaism as well. What is missing is the rest of church history and systematics. This is all the more deplorable as Wright actually set out intending to operate with an integrated encyclopedia (see PFG, pp. 46–55 for many problematic statements on various disciplines, including subsuming exegesis under history, and pp. 70–71 for attempts at integrating all the theological disciplines except the ones he doesn't like). It is fair to say that Wright despises systematic theology. For example, on page 842, he says

This, to repeat, has nothing to do with Jesus' own 'faith' in the sense of his 'religious awareness', his belief in God, his refusal to trust in his own good works, or anything like that. That is to pull the meaning of *pistis* away from where it was in (Romans, LK) 3:2–4 and off into the realm of normal Christian dogmatics, thus failing to pay attention to what Paul is actually talking about.

Wright is talking about Romans 3:21–22, and the translation of *pistis* there. His translation, predictably, is "the faithful justice of the covenant God." The implication of the quotation appears to be that putting something in the realm of normal Christian dogmatics automatically takes it out of the realm of what Paul is actually talking about.

Wright several times reaches a conclusion that he seems to believe no one else has thought of before, and which he certainly assumes the Reformation has ignored. However, his ignorance of the Reformational tradition and his rejection of systematic theology result in his arriving at a conclusion that has already been pre-empted by the Reformation. Take PPEOP, pp. 308–310 as an example. There, in the context of castigating the Reformation for equating justification with conversion, he comes up with what he presents as a new thought: it is the *call* which is the moment of conversion (p. 310). Effectual calling is mentioned in just about every Reformed systematic theology that this reviewer has read!

Wright is unclear about the basis of justification. On the one hand, he notes that the eschatological verdict of "being in the right" has come forward into history on the basis of the Messiah. However, when it comes to so-called "final justification," it is "on the basis of the totality of the life that has been led" (PFG 938). How can both be true? Wright changes the basis of justification depending on whether it is the "already" or the "not yet." And yet he says that they correspond (PFG 939). The problem here is twofold: first, Wright does not explain what he means by "basis." Second, he fails to realize that if the two verdicts are the same verdict, they cannot be based on different foundations.

Furthermore, Wright's understanding of imputation is constantly flawed by his court-room analogy, which invariably leaves out the most important character: the advocate. He accuses the Reformation of positing that the Judge's (God's)

righteousness is passed to the defendant like a gas.¹ On p. 946, footnote 480 of PFG, he charges that the Reformers “regularly elided the idea of ‘Christ’s righteousness’ with that of ‘God’s righteousness,’ wrongly interpreting the latter as ‘the righteous status’ of God’s people.” This bears little resemblance to any Reformational reading of Paul, in which Christ is certainly God; but the righteousness that is imputed to believers is the righteousness of the Messiah, the righteousness that He earned throughout life, not the righteousness of the Judge. One can safely say that Wright’s rejection of Reformational readings of Paul is real, but is based on rather systemic caricatures of the Reformational positions.

There are other inconsistencies in these works as well. Wright argues that Romans 9–11 “is aimed rhetorically at a gentile audience” (PFG, p. 1201). However, in answering an objection that the readers could not have understood a reference to the golden calf incident (Wright is talking about Romans 9:14–18), he answers by claiming that the theologian in question (Harink) “fail[s] to see how second-temple Jews, their heads full of Torah, constructed discourse.” Wright seems to want to have the somewhat dubious benefits of reading Paul against a background of Second-Temple Judaism without being tied to a claim that Paul was writing to said Jews. Wright is not just talking about Paul here, as the first part of the footnote makes plain: “and his hearers.” If Paul was aiming his discourse rhetorically at a Gentile audience, then doesn’t that bring into question Wright’s attempt to read all of Romans against the backdrop of Israel’s story?²

This leads us to a specific critique of Wright’s general picture of the Bible (described above). If Israel was God’s attempt at fixing what Adam broke, and that plan didn’t work out, then didn’t God fail all the way up to the time of the Messiah? What if Israel itself was not the solution, but rather the conduit of the solution through the promises of land and seed? This leads to a much more consistent picture of God’s own character, in my opinion. Does N.T. Wright actually believe that God failed? It is more than possible. In PPEOP, p. 426, he says: “Humans sin; that’s their problem, but God’s problem is bigger, namely that his plan for the world is thwarted. So God calls Abraham

to be the means of rescuing humankind. Then Israel rebels; that’s their problem, but God’s problem is bigger, namely that his plan to rescue humans and thereby the world is thwarted.” This is extremely unguarded language. God’s plan is never thwarted, nor was God taken by surprise when Adam and Eve fell into sin. God’s plan was never thwarted by Israel, either. This more than plays footsie with open theism, the idea that God is always forced to resort to plan b, or plan c, and so on.

To sum up, Wright is a brilliant author and theologian, and there are things of value in these works, such as particular readings of passages, defenses of the traditional doctrine of Christ’s resurrection from the dead, annihilation of dispensationalism, and his view of the new heavens and new earth (all of which are hidden among the excessive verbiage of a highly loquacious, not to say wordy theologian! This reviewer is not the first to complain that PFG is too long). However, these two works are much better at expounding N.T. Wright’s theology than they are at explaining Paul’s. They are important conversation partners for any scholars talking about Paul. However, it is doubtful that they will retain much value for the Reformed world, as there is not much in these volumes that will preach. ■

Review: Sinclair Ferguson, *From the Mouth of God: Trusting, Reading, and Applying the Bible* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2014). 209 pp. ISBN 978-1-84871-242-3. \$15.00 (paperback). Reviewed by Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Stivason, pastor of Grace Reformed Presbyterian Church (RPCNA), in Gibsonia, PA. Ph.D., Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia.

Many years ago my two friends and I developed an interest in rock climbing. We had an important rule: “He who ties the knot goes first!” On one outing two of us waited quite some time for our friend to tie the rope and rappel to where we were waiting below. When we finally investigated we found him reading a book on how to tie knots! As I read Sinclair Ferguson’s *From the Mouth of God* that memory came back to me. This will be a book to which those who love the Word of God will return again and again for help.

From the Mouth of God is a revised and expanded edition of his earlier 1982 book *Handle with Care*. However, despite keeping virtually the same outline and much of the same material, *From the Mouth of God* is no mere reprint. It is almost double the size of the original and boasts an appendix with an essay from John Murray, another from John Newton, suggestions for further reading and the same Bible reading plan as was in the original version.

The great value of this new edition is the fact that it was “re-written” by a pastor/theologian who has spent almost his

1. See Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 98. He is more nuanced on page 946 of PFG, footnote 480 and page 950, footnote 487, but still manages to caricature the Reformed position by implying that “many of their successors have been allergic to covenantal ideas” (p. 946). Wright outright denies imputation in any Reformational sense on p. 951: “This is not, however, a matter of the Messiah possessing in himself the status of ‘righteous,’ and this ‘righteousness of the Messiah’ somehow being ‘imputed’ to the believer.”

2. While it is possible that the author would put things into his writings that the audience might not fully understand (see PFG, 13–14), it is incomprehensible that it would happen on so great a scale as Wright imagines.

entire calling dividing his time equally between pulpit and lectern. Although written not for specialists but for ordinary Christians, this book is a clear and thoughtful presentation of what Scripture is and why it is important. For example, in the first of three sections, Ferguson helps his readers to understand that “inspiration” in 2 Timothy 3:16 is not about its effect on us (inspiring us), but about its source in God. What is more, Ferguson contends that the Bible “is not an object into which God breathed, but something which God himself breathed out” (10). God is the source of what men wrote because what they wrote, He breathed out.

Ferguson takes his readers deeper into the mystery of how men could be conscious of expressing their own thoughts while at the same time being under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit. According to Ferguson, “Theologians call this two-dimensional reality ‘concurrency,’” adding that inspiration is a special example of this concursive operation. As an aside, Old Princeton theologian B. B. Warfield wrote on this particular mode of inspiration and his work is still of great profit today.

However, for those at all familiar with the current debate surrounding the nature of Scripture, it is Ferguson’s brief section on inerrancy that is most welcome. According to Ferguson, the Scripture is completely reliable because the God who has breathed out Scripture is entirely trustworthy (38). Or, as Ferguson put it, the Bible is without error. It is inerrant. Ferguson reminds his readers that the word “inerrancy” is a privative word (39). It tells us what Scripture is not, which prompts the question, what kind of inerrancy do we mean? In other words, how shall we qualify the word inerrancy?

At this point, Ferguson anticipates the opposition. Those critical of an inerrantist position are quick to argue that a word like inerrant is certainly unhelpful because it needs to be qualified. Those who are critical offer “infallible” as a better term contending that it is older than inerrancy, which is a relatively recent term. Ferguson cuts to the chase by calling such an objection naïve. He then offers a priceless illustration to counter. All golf clubs have shafts—“senior” or “regular” or “stiff” or even “extra stiff.” If the new golfer says, “These qualifying terms are unhelpful! If you have to qualify “shaft” in these different ways then you should not use the term!” To which the manufacturer will reply, “Sir, you don’t understand. These qualifications clarify. If you are going to hit a golf ball with a club you will soon see the importance of these qualifications!” (40). Thus, the qualifications theologians make with regard to “inerrancy” clarify.

Ferguson contends next with those who claim that infallibility is the older and better term (40). He quickly points out the obvious: infallibility equally needs to be qualified. In fact, to use the term infallible actually leads to more questions.

Ferguson says, “When you say ‘Scripture is infallible’ do you mean ‘error free’ (with the Oxford English Dictionary), or what? Is Scripture ‘infallible’ on all matters, or only some? Is it ‘infallible’ in historical detail, and in scientific issues, or is the infallibility linked only to what it says about God?” Ferguson’s point is clear, when using the word infallible there is not less reason to qualify.

Third, Ferguson broaches the issue of the term “inerrancy” being prominently used in North America because those who are critical of inerrancy often challenge the term by reducing it to an American problem. Ferguson turns this challenge on its head by arguing that the massive number of Christians, seminaries, and the enormous publication load make it hardly a surprise that America would be home to this position or any other for that matter.

I have certainly only given a snapshot of the first section. It is helpful and will be an asset to the laity as they experience the fallout of the twenty-first century’s renewal of the battle for the Bible. This is not to say that all of Ferguson’s arguments are untouchable. For instance, when he quotes an 1893 Encyclical from Leo XIII in order to demonstrate that inerrancy is not a recent evangelical invention or an idiosyncratic view of a narrow band of modern theologians he perhaps opens himself up to the objection that Pope Leo XIII was infected by the same modernism that had infected nineteenth century evangelicalism. Nevertheless, Ferguson’s point is well taken; inerrancy was not an American invention but was obviously European and even Roman Catholic as well!

The second section of the book has to do with reading the Scriptures. How do we read and make sense of the Bible? In this section, Ferguson supplies the reader with encouragement, principles for interpreting Scripture, and discussions about different genres. One of the most helpful things for the beginning reader is the five essential principles that must become second nature for any reader of Scripture (71–84). This section is clearly the longest of the three and provides a great deal of practical instruction for those wanting to read the Bible for all its worth.

But Ferguson does more than give us principles. He also encourages us to handle the Bible properly and then reminds us that such a thing can be hard work, reminding us of the old adage: “Half the bad theology in the world is due to suppressed perspiration” (63). It is only after we are determined to work hard that we are able and ready to move to the study of Scripture. Ferguson helps the reader study by taking him or her through the principles required to interpret prose, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, gospels, epistles, and visions.

However, Ferguson not only helps us with the principles but he provides us with a substantial example of a Bible study from the book of Ruth (131–148). Thus, the product is a well-informed but wonderfully accessible book for those

in pews—and even for those in the classroom—who want to read Scripture profitably.

The third section deals with us as readers. Here Ferguson helps us to understand the profitability of reading Scripture. Taking us back to 2 Timothy 3, he unfolds Paul's four profitable ways in which the Spirit brings the Scriptures to bear upon our lives. The first is that Scripture is profitable for teaching. Ferguson supplies three reasons why teaching the word is crucial. Our minds are naturally dark and need to be illumined by the word. Since our minds have been confused we have confused thoughts about Christ. Finally, the mind is crucial for living a lively Christian life (156–157).

Second, the Scripture is profitable for reproof (or the related term, conviction; 158). Third, the word is profitable for correcting (159). Though this word is a hapax legomenon it does appear in the Septuagint and its root (orthos) means straight line. The idea is that the word has the power to straighten what is crooked in someone's life. Fourth, the word is profitable for training in righteousness. According to Ferguson, this has an eye to shaping us into a Christlike image. Although none of this comes easily, if we are believers then it must and does come.

Being a pastor, Ferguson is not simply concerned that we have the principles and tools we need to interpret Scripture. He is also concerned with us, that is, with our hearts. The parable of the soils provides Ferguson with a way to challenge us to take to heart what we are reading and studying. Ferguson's insight in these lines displays the wisdom that he has gleaned from serving in the ministry. As Ferguson says of the parable, "Understanding it does not require a high level of education. But it does require insight into spiritual realities" (168).

And Ferguson does give us spiritual insight, even into the harmful realities of worldliness. Like a well trained physician of the soul his work consists in educating the believing patient in the subtle dangers of this well-known malady of the faithful, and for good reason. Because of its chameleon like quality worldliness has a way of disguising itself against any background and so is a tremendous threat to the well-being of any believer (168). Hear also what Ferguson says about concentration: "There is no short cut. There is no substitute for becoming thoroughly acquainted with God's mind and will revealed to us in the Bible and having our responses tested in the cauldron of life. It is through hardships that we enter the kingdom of God. If there is to be lasting fruit, there will be divine pruning" (171).

This section is followed by a final short chapter giving sound counsel and positive encouragement concerning the reading of Scripture. This chapter coupled with the reading program at the end will get even the youngest of God's children up and walking. We might also mention the value

of placing John Murray and John Newton in the appendix. There is a great deal of mysticism today, due to the rise of postmodernism. An appendix dealing with divine guidance is surely one of the greatest needs in the church. Men, women, and children need to be directed to the Word of God if they are to have ample footing in unstable times.

Surrounded as we are today by those who seek to undermine the trustworthiness of Scripture, this book is a welcome ointment. When I read Ferguson's hope in the introduction that his readers will return again and again to certain sections for closer deeper study I thought of my friend sitting on the top of the cliff reading his book on how to tie knots. Over twenty years later my friend still keeps that book in his pack. Ferguson's *From the Mouth of God* is a book worth keeping and carrying and reading. ■

Review Article: *Wright on Evil*. N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006). 176 pp. ISBN. 978-0-83083-398-6. By Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Stivason, pastor of Grace Reformed Presbyterian Church (RPCNA), in Gibsonia, PA. Ph.D., Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia.

After completing his colossal work, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, in 2003 N. T. Wright decided to focus his attention on the death of the Son of God, which led to the publication of *Evil and the Justice of God* in 2006. In 2014, Wright published, *Surprised by Scripture*, a series of essays which includes a chapter titled, "9/11, Tsunamis, and the New Problem of Evil," which is an abbreviation of his 2006 book. Wright's incorporation of this article is warrant enough for us to take a closer look at the argument in *Evil and the Justice of God*.

According to Wright, Christians usually associate Jesus' death on the cross with the answer to, or the result of, evil.¹ Bluntly stated, Christians believe that in the death of Jesus evil is and will be defeated (*EJG*, 17). What is more, Wright believes that his reflections on the death of Jesus and the Messiah's triumph over evil touch upon and even overlap wider global manifestations of evil. For Wright, the death of Jesus and the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers of New York City are organically related, both were the result of evil and in the death of Jesus both were overcome.

Yet, Wright is not concerned to puzzle through the old re-sorted philosophical conundrums that merely turn over the same pensive soil. Nor is he interested in old theological distinctions that have the appearance of pitting God against himself. Wright's aim is to offer a Christian understanding of the problem of evil, not simply that we might understand why Jesus died, but that we might understand what God is doing in the world (*EJG*, 16–17). Such an endeavor appears daunting even for one as capable as is Wright.

1. N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 9. Hereafter *EJG*.

Therefore, I will begin with an analysis of evil from Wright's perspective. Second, I will explore Wright's answer to the problem of evil as it is found in the death of Jesus. Finally, I will offer some conclusions of my own concerning Wright's answer to the problem of evil.

I. Evil From a Wright Perspective?

In a section of chapter one entitled, "Toward a Nuanced View of Evil," Wright touches on a crucial point in methodology that is critical for an understanding of his analysis of evil. When looking at the problem of evil broadly, Wright says, "the major worldviews have all had ways of addressing it" (*EJG*, 34). After a brief explanatory sentence for each of the major worldviews, Wright asks, "What might a Christian view of evil, or for that matter a Jewish view, look like?" (*EJG*, 35). By view, I take it he means worldview. This is crucial. And Wright himself contends, "That is of course the subject of this book..." (*Ibid.*). Wright's book is about the Christian worldview and evil's place in it. Consequently, in order to proceed with some sense of understanding with regard to the problem of evil we must explore Wright's concept of worldview.

Wright's Concept of Worldview

As crucial as the concept is, Wright does not give an explanation of worldview in *Evil and the Justice of God*, so we must seek a definition or description from his other writings. And there is no better place to find an exposition of his concept of worldview than in, *The New Testament and the People of God*.² Wright sets forth his views there on epistemology, history, and worldview. We will briefly look at all three.

Relational best describes Wright's epistemology (*NTPG*, 45). For him, human knowing is "storied." But what does that mean? According to Wright, this storied way of knowing describes,

[the] "process of 'knowing' that acknowledges the *reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower* ... while also fully acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiraling path of *appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known* (*NTPG*, 35, *emph. his*).

Crucial to understanding Wright's position is the presence of "dialogue or conversation" that must be present between the knower and thing known in order to have knowledge. Wright describes this dialogical process in three stages.

First, the observer is looking from one perspective alone. Second, all humans interpret the information received from the senses through "a grid of expectations, memories, stories, psychological states and so on" (*NTPG*, 36). In other

words, Individuals receive and process information through one perspective, which Wright calls basic beliefs and aims. Third, these basic beliefs and aims serve to express and safeguard the perspective or worldview of which the individual is a part. Thus, the individual's basic beliefs and aims cannot and must not be divorced from the communal worldview in which he lives. Every community has certain "assumptions, traditions, expectations, anxieties, and so forth, which encourages its members to construe reality in particular ways."³

Two important points stand out for our purposes with regard to Wright's philosophy of history. First, it is important for us to notice that all three stages of Wright's epistemology admit no such thing as a neutral or detached observer. The individual views the events of life from his perspective, which necessarily include the perspective of his community. What is more, the observer cannot free himself from this way of seeing the events of history. He must see from one perspective or another. He is, as it were, trapped in his own perspective, whatever that may be.

Second, the dialogical process articulated by Wright involves selection. History, according to Wright, is never simply recording "what actually happened."⁴ Wright correctly observes that an attempt to record what happened without selection would fail due to the sheer amount of information. Furthermore, Wright says that such a process inevitably involves a major element of interpretation (*NTPG*, 83). Thus, for Wright, all knowing and understanding has to do with reflection on the part of human beings: "all knowledge comes *via* somebody's perceptions and reflections" (*Ibid.*). Again, Wright claims, "In reality what we call 'facts' always belong in a context of response, perception, and interaction—a process which is both complex and continuing" (*NTPG*, 83).

Thus, Wright correctly draws the conclusion from his dialogical epistemology and philosophy of history that any 'realism' which is to survive has to take on board the fact that all statements are provisional in nature (*NTPG*, 36). Such a

2. The first 144 pages of *The New Testament and the People of God* serve as a prolegomena back to which Wright continually takes his readers (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 1992). At the outset (page 11) of Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 1996) he guides the reader back to these basic categories that he developed in the prolegomena of *NTPG*.

3. Wright, *NTPG*, 36. Although there are glaring differences between Gadamer and Wright, here we find a point of similarity in that Gadamer tries to locate meaning in the larger community, Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 1977), 7. Cf Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1980), 106–107.

4. Wright, *NTPG*, 82. According to Wright, this epistemological observation is not just relevant to history, rather "history shares this with other knowing" (83).

position leads Wright inevitably to at least two conclusions. First, there is no such thing as a bare event.⁵ That is, says Wright,

It will not do to say at this point that, when all the above allowances have been made, there simply are some things which can still be said, on the basis of empirical sense-data, about the world external to the observer(s). No: instead of working from the particulars of observation, or 'sense-data, to confident statements about external reality, positivistically conceived, critical realism (as I am proposing it) sees knowledge of particulars as taking place within the larger framework of the story or worldview which forms the basis of the observer's way of being in relation to the world (NTPG, 37).

Thus, Wright emphatically maintains the impossibility of reviving any form of what he identifies as "positivism," that is to say, there are some things that are "simply objectively true, some things about which we can have, and actually do have, solid and unquestionable evidence" (NTPG, 32). We should note that Wright understands an orthodox view of revelation as positivistic (NTPG, 128). Wright's framework simply will not allow for such a thing.

Second, and not surprisingly, Wright claims that there can be no such thing as a set of timeless historical truths.⁶ Remember, for Wright, history is not just bare facts but the meaningful narrative of events and intentions, which is another way of saying that history is an individual and communal exercise producing one common perspective, which functions as an epistemological lens for interpreting all other events and intentions. It appears that, for Wright, truth is relative to a particular worldview and worldviews are simply vehicles that express individual perceptions and reflections through story, symbols, praxis, and questions and answers (NTPG, 117).

What does this mean for the problem of evil? Or perhaps a better way, a Wrightian way of asking the question would be how do we tell the Christian story with regard to evil (EJG, 41)? How do we tell it without attempting to solve the problem in a simplistic way while at the same time addressing it in a mature fashion? Moreover, how do we speak to those outside of the Judeo-Christian worldview?

5. NTPG, 63. Interestingly, Cornelius Van Til's would agree with such an assertion. There is no such thing as a bare event or as Van Til might say, a brute fact. However, Van Til would certainly not agree with Wright's concept of worldview because ultimately Wright does not allow for God's interpretation of the "facts."

6. NTPG, 39. Cf. also Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God* (p. 173). Hereafter JVG. "Jesus moral teaching, so-called, cannot be reduced to the level of timeless ethics.... Nor can it be seen simply as instruction for the ongoing life of 'the church.'"

THE ANSWER IN STORY

Chapter two offers the start of an answer to the above questions. But Wright doesn't simply want to provide a Christian answer to the problem of evil. He is not interested in simply telling a story that will make sense of the problem within the Judeo-Christian worldview alone. His aim is broader than that. Wright wants to tell a story that will maturely address the Christian problem as well as address, say, the Hindu or Buddhist family that lost family to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Simply put, Wright's first order concern is to offer a narrative that will encompass all narratives, a story that will include all stories, and Wright believes that Christianity can function as that meta-narrative.

So Wright attempts to demonstrate the Old Testament's meta-narrative potential by focusing on the evil that is manifest not just in Israel but in all humanity. For Wright, the narrative logic of the Old Testament goes like this; first, God's call on Abraham's life in Genesis 12 is to be construed as God's attempt to address the problem that evidenced itself in Genesis 3 and following. Yet, within the story of Abraham's calling we discover a second order problem. Though Abraham's children may be carriers of the promise they too are part of the problem. Thus, within that story we also discover a third level problem; the problem of evil is manifest in all humanity, both Jew and Gentile alike (EJG, 46).

So, for Wright, God, in the Old Testament scriptures, is not simply dealing with the problem of evil as defined or described by the Judeo-Christian worldview, he is dealing with the forces of evil and chaos deep inside each one of us. Thus, according to Wright, God is dealing with the problem of evil for all of humanity within the worldview of Israel (and finally its Christian extension). Therefore, if humanity wants to see what God is up to with regard to the problem of evil, then they should start by looking at Israel.

After describing how God has dealt with the problem of evil in the Old Testament, Wright concludes that despite the fact that there is in these stories a strong sense of God's strange providence there is also an emerging pattern (EJG, 54-55). A pattern characterized by God's judgement upon evil and God's willingness to rescue His people from whatever disaster has befallen them in spite of the fact that they too are part of the problem.

A BETTER LOOK AT THE PROBLEM AND AN ANSWER

This pattern of judgment and rescue leads Wright to develop another aspect of God's story in the Old Testament. Wright says that in three books in particular (Isaiah, Daniel, and Job) we are invited higher up the mountain for a better look at what God is doing (EJG, 62). This "better look" essentially consists of three aspects.

First, God will save the people of Israel due to His

faithfulness to the covenant. According to Wright, God is determined to complete His original plan for creation and to do it through His image bearing human creatures, more specifically, through the family of Abraham (*EJG*, 64). However, as we have already seen this too has a problem. The people that God rescued are part of the problem. Consequently, something else must be done.

Thus, from the fabric of Isaiah the image of the Servant is discernable. The Servant is clearly, as Wright contends, Israel-in-person (*EJG*, 65). The Servant is pictured as sharing the story of Israel, exiled, crushed, and killed. He embodies the covenant faithfulness of God. Here Wright reminds us that once the Servant deals with the problem of evil within the worldview of Israel, then all of humanity may proceed toward the new creation (*EJG*, 65). Thus, for Wright, the worldview of Israel is a meta-narrative for humanity at large. In Israel and specifically in the Servant (Israel-in-person), humanity may see how God is dealing with the problem of evil.

Second, whereas Isaiah tells the story of how Israel, and consequently humanity, will be put back to the right with God, so now, Daniel depicts God's restoration of the image of creation. This restoration is coterminous with the vindication of God's faithful people and therefore must come with the overthrow of evil.

Third, according to Wright, the book of Job tells us several things but pre-eminently the book tells us one thing that Wright will integrate into the rest of his book, namely, the unbalanced creation will be put right within creation itself, not somewhere else (*EJG*, 70–71). For Wright, heaven can never be the answer to evil. The answer must be given and received in creation.⁷ Thus, Wright has set the stage for the next chapter in which we will encounter the Servant and his restorative and healing work.

II. Evil and Jesus: An Answer

Wright contends that theologies of the cross have not typically grappled with the larger problem of evil as he set it forth in chapter one. In other words, as he sees it, there is no attempt to organically connect the cross to terrorist attacks, tsunami victims, or hurricane survivors. Rather, Wright argues that much of nineteenth and twentieth century theology has been concerned with a theology of the cross that rescues people from an evil world, forgiveness in the present, and promises a heaven hereafter (*EJG*, 77–78). However, for Wright the Gospels tell a story of how the evil in the world—political, social, personal, moral, emotional—reached its height, and how God's long-term plan finally came to a climax in Jesus (*EJG*, 79).

In a few brief paragraphs, Wright develops each of these categories from a perspective of the Gospels. He then adds, "the story the Gospels are trying to tell us is the story of how

the death of Jesus is the point at which evil in all its forms has come rushing together" (*EJG*, 82, 83).

JESUS' WORLDVIEW AND VOCATION

Before moving on it might be helpful to note another point of methodology in Wright's formulation. Since this story centers on Jesus it might be prudent to explore Wright's Christology. In the opening paragraph of chapter 3 Wright asked, "Why did Jesus die?" (*EJG*, 75). The answer is telling. Wright contends, "Jesus himself believed, in some sense, that it was his vocation." (*Ibid.*). But what does this mean? Historically Christians have contended for a necessary connection between the divinity of Christ and his atoning death. Is Wright equating vocation with divinity? Did Jesus, in some sense, believe himself to be divine? For Wright, this is not even the correct formulation of the question.⁸

According to Wright, to concern ourselves with trying to discover whether or not Jesus thought of himself as divine is not only to press the text of the Gospel story beyond where it goes but such a question would even make Jesus cock his head in wonder (*JVG*, 614). This type of question tries to fit Jesus into a certain view of God that would have been foreign to a first century Jewish man. For Wright, when we think of God, we must think like a first century Jew. We must think in metaphorical language about a God who rescues His people from oppressors and establishes his presence in their midst. It is only in these metaphors that Jesus sense of vocation, as YHWH's representative, can be understood.

So according to Wright, the best we are able to do is look at those things about Jesus, which will help us to discover his own mindset (*JVG*, 196, 200). And once we understand his mindset, then we can explore his aims, motivations, and intentions in the context of his worldview. When all the evidence is in, Wright concludes that the most we can talk about with regard to Jesus' self-understanding is his sense of vocation conditioned by his worldview (*JVG*, 143–144; *emph. mine*; cf. also 647–648).

Thus, when we explore Jesus' sense of vocation we find, according to Wright, that Jesus believed himself to be the embodiment of the Temple (*JVG*, 111–114). In addition, Jesus understood his ride into Jerusalem as the return of YHWH to Zion (*JVG*, 116–118). These, among other things, are to be understood, of course, as metaphorical much like when Jeremiah smashed his pot or when Ezekiel remained on his side (*JVG*, 615). Thus, we see that in the stories Jesus told and in the way he practiced Israel's symbols he was answering some of their deepest worldview questions.

7. Though there is a sense in which this is true it is difficult to see from this book whether Wright believes in an intermediate state.

8. N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 106.

This conclusion seems to bring us full circle. The most that Jesus can know about himself, according to Wright, are his own perceptions and reflections and, of course, Jesus may have been wrong about them and he knew it.⁹ After all, we must never forget, says Wright, that Jesus' own friends thought he was mad (*JVG*, 647–648). Jesus was a Jewish man operating within the context of second-Temple Judaism and his own mindset was simply an application of this worldview.

JESUS AND THE ATONEMENT

Having a clearer understanding of Wright's Christology we can now see that the atoning death of Jesus is his self-identification with Israel in metaphorical terms (*EJG*, 86). And, as such, on the cross Jesus thought of himself as taking on himself "the direct consequences ... of the ... failure and sin of Israel" (*EJG*, 86). In other words, Jesus was literally shouldering the direct result of political, social, personal, moral, and emotional manifestations of evil and he saw himself doing it metaphorically for the nation of Israel (*EJG*, 86). But Wright contends that Jesus didn't do these things for Israel alone. Remember, according to Wright, Israel is the place where the rest of the world can see what God is doing about evil. Therefore, says Wright, Jesus "is Israel's and the world's representative, he can stand in for all" (*EJG*, 95).

Yet, the question that begs to be asked is a simple one. How does the death of Jesus help me? If Wright's Jesus, at least as he understood things, was taking on himself the consequences of the first century political system, personal estrangement, and all the social and cultic repercussions, then fine. But how does that help me?

Wright is not long in providing an answer. He writes, "Jesus suffering and death are an *example* of how we are summoned to love one another in turn" (*EJG*, 95; *emph. his*). But Wright understands the theological implications of reducing the cross to a mere example (*EJG*, 95). So, a few pages later he writes, "The call of the Gospel is for the church to *implement* the victory of God in the world *through suffering love*" (*EJG*, 98).

But by arguing that the church must implement what Jesus did on the cross is Wright arguing that what Jesus did is something more than an example? He thinks so. Wright says, "The cross is not just an example to be followed: it is an achievement to be worked out, put into practice" (*EJG*, 98). Certainly Wright may want to avoid an accusation from conservative theologians that he has reduced the work of Christ to that of a moral exemplar. However, it is hard to see from this statement and the following pages any clear distinction

9. Wright, *JVG*, 609. Cf. N.T. Wright, "Jesus' Self Understanding," [cited 10/23/07]. Online: http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Jesus_Self.htm.

10. This is the case whether one looks in *Evil and the Justice of God* or *Jesus and the Victory of God*, cf. p. 597–611.

between following Christ's work as an example or the church's implementation of it and a full-bodied view of the atonement offered by Reformed theology.¹⁰

Thus, for Wright, Jesus enacted his plan to suffer metaphorically for Israel on Passover, a time of freedom in Israel's history (*JVG*, 605). Thus, says Wright, though it was a huge gamble, Jesus hoped that the people would understand that his death had implications for them (*JVG*, 609). In other words, Jesus hoped that his death under the metaphorical weight of sin and his resurrection, which is synonymous with the forgiveness of sin, would result in the release of those who were held captive by its guilt and power (*EJG*, 90). To put it simply, Jesus hoped that others would catch the metaphor and follow his example.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MOVING FORWARD

So, we return to our question, how does the death of Jesus help? Wright says, "The cross was and remains a call to a different vocation, a new way of dealing with evil and ultimately a new vision of God" (*EJG*, 99). Here we have an answer. The cross is our example to be implemented as a new way of dealing with evil. Thus, in chapter four Wright advances his argument by telling us the decisive way in which implementing the achievement of the cross is to have its effect (*EJG*, 102).

Wright opens the chapter by sharing his methodology, he wants to start at the end. In other words, he wants us to imagine a world in which there is no evil. But in order to imagine such a thing we need to know who or what we are up against. So, Wright includes a section he calls, "Interlude: Naming the Powers," wherein he deals with the root of the problem.

WHAT IS EVIL?

Wright correctly reasons that evil has a hidden dimension; there is more than meets the eye (*EJG*, 107). For Wright, this extra hidden element includes a force or forces, which are very real but difficult to define. In the Old Testament, Wright believes that this force is named "the satan" (*EJG*, 108). Wright is aware that by describing the satan in quasi-personal terms there are those who might accuse him of denying the personhood of the Accuser" (*EJG*, 111).

But, contends Wright, "I prefer to use the term "subpersonal" or "quasi-personal" as a way of refusing to accord the satan with the full dignity of personhood..." (*EJG*, 111). Though this may sound somewhat pietistic Wright finishes his statement with these words, "[while] recognizing that the concentration of activity (its subtle schemes and devices) can and does strike us as very much like that which we associate with personhood" (*EJG*, 111–112). But this seems less than clear. What does Wright think of "the satan?" Does Wright believe that "the satan" is a person who has no right to the dignity of the title personhood or is he saying that "it" (the satan) is

something which has activity resembling personhood but has no right to the claim?

We can only answer that question if we step back to look over the landscape of the book thus far, then we notice something very interesting. All of this talk about “the satan” fits into a larger framework. Wright is not simply dealing with “the satan” because he wants to deal with demonology for inquiring readers. No, Wright is telling us something. He is helping us to see what evil really is. So, let’s notice the progression of his thought.

In chapter three, Wright defined evil as, “[the] force of anti-creation, anti-life, the force which opposes and seeks to deface and destroy God’s good world of space, time and matter, and above all God’s image-bearing human creatures” (*EJG*, 89). He defined death as, “[the] corruption and decay of the good creation and of humans who bear God’s image” (*EJG*, 116). Wright also says of the satan, “The biblical picture of the satan is thus of a nonhuman and nondivine quasi-personal force which seems bent on attacking and destroying creation in general and humankind in particular. . .” (*EJG*, 109).

The reader begins to see a pattern emerge. Evil, death, and the satan are to be thought of as correlative. Furthermore, the purpose of evil, death, and the satan are manifest in human sinfulness. According to Wright, sin is the rebellion of humankind against the vocation of reflecting God’s glory in the world, which results in the loss of image bearing humanness (*EJG*, 109). Thus, humanity is in the service of evil, death, and the satan.

Noteworthy is Wright’s next claim, he says that “evil may well exist inside ourselves as well—there may be *forces of evil and chaos* deep inside us of which we are at best only subliminally aware” (*EJG*, 15; *emph. mine*; cf. 111). Wright speaks of dark forces on a suprapersonal level, which he hesitatingly calls demonic (*EJG*, 81). In fact, says Wright, it was this demonic force called the satan which was doing its best to drag Jesus down into the trap into which Israel had already fallen (*EJG*, 81).

At this point Wright has raised a question for his readers. Does humanity provide personhood for the evil negative force known as the satan? Thus, Jesus calls us to follow his example and defeat the negative forces, the satan at work in each one of us just as he himself did. The absence of any serious doctrine of sin and an atonement soteriology with moral exemplar as its main feature certainly do not help to convince us that this is otherwise the case. Notice then Wright’s summary of Jesus’ work on the cross,

The good news, according to the whole of the New Testament, is that this negative force—this quasi-personal, shadowy being or beings—has been defeated on the cross of Jesus Christ. This is part of the

full exploration and outworking of what I was talking about in the previous chapter. As I said there, I am inclined to see the theme of *Christus Victor*, the victory of Jesus Christ over all the powers of evil and darkness, as the central theme in atonement theology, around which all the other varied meanings of the cross find their particular niche.¹¹

Thus, since Jesus has subdued, albeit metaphorically, *all* the powers of evil we are brought back to Wright’s earlier point; we too can implement Jesus’ example in our own lives and overcome evil as well.

BACK TO IMPLEMENTATION

Now, with this in mind we can have a better understanding of what it means to implement the death of Jesus in our own lives. To put it another way, we too can implement forgiveness in the face of negative forces in our own lives. For Wright, this implementation has to come at two levels, the world level and the personal level. At a world level Wright offers two strategies that will enable implementation.

The first strategy is a set of tasks (*EJG*, 119–125). I’ll briefly mention them and their significance. The first is prayer. In order to be transformed in our thinking we must turn our mental frustration over the way things are into prayers that will cultivate new habits of thinking. Second, Christians must seek to live holy lives or lives that will emulate the example set by Jesus. Third, Christians must remind political authorities that their task is to do justice and love mercy and help others to do likewise. Fourth, penal codes must not swing to extremes but seek to restore offended parties by bringing both victim and the accused together to look at what has happened and find a way forward. Fifth, rather than might or silence good international structures are need so that the example of the cross can have an international effect.

The second strategy Wright advocates is to educate the imagination (*EJG*, 125). We need to imagine what a world without evil will be like. Clearly we no longer live in the Garden of Eden but perhaps, suggests Wright, one way of heading back in that direction is good art. Art can capture the beautiful, says Wright, and help us think about our world as it was meant to be.

However, when we arrive at the last chapter which deals with implementation of the cross at a personal level we find very little that is different from the previous chapter. In fact, Wright draws his personal examples from the global economy, international and interracial tension, and criminal justice (included in this is the International Criminal Court; *EJG*,

11. Wright, *EJG*, 114. Interestingly, like everything else, Wright has his own understanding of those other varied themes. See, for instance, his understanding of penal substitution on page 95.

151). However, there are some things in this chapter worth our reflection because they do help to further our understanding of Wright's position or perhaps better they reiterate his position a bit more clearly.

Wright's first point affirms our previous observation that he does in fact teach a low view of sin. Speaking of forgiveness Wright claims that Jesus "isn't setting the moral bar at an impossible height and then warning that God will be everlastingly cross if we don't manage to jump it" (*EJG*, 158). Now, it is true that forgiveness is possible for the Christian. What is more, the Christian must forgive. But to suggest, as Wright does, that forgiveness, according to God's specs, is something that all humanity can achieve is to reveal a very low view of sin and human inability.

However, second, for Wright, the cross is simply an example. Thus, we are not surprised to discover that Wright denies what orthodoxy has called the great exchange or double imputation. Instead, according to Wright, "The atonement is not simply an abstract transaction making God's forgiveness available to those who want it..." (*EJG*, 156). Thus, Wright fails to teach a robust atonement theology found throughout Scripture.

Therefore, third, Wright explains what this forgiveness looks like in real life. I will quote the passage in full but it will help if we keep in mind all that I have said previously about Wright's terms and concepts.

To begin with, it [forgiveness] means a settled determination to name evil and to shame it; without that there is, after all, nothing to forgive. To follow that, forgiveness means that we are equally determined to do everything in our power to resume an appropriate relationship with the offender after the evil has been dealt with. Finally, forgiveness means that we have settled it in our minds that we shall not allow this evil to determine the sort of people we shall then become. That is what forgiveness is all about. It is tough: tough to do, tough to receive—and tough also in the sense that once it's really happened, forgiveness is strong, unlike soggy tolerance which merely takes the line of least resistance (*EJG*, 152).

After reading a paragraph like this one in light of all that has gone before one can't help but start reaching for their bootstraps.

12. George W. Stroup, *The Promise of Narrative Theology* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981), 61.

13. Marcus J. Borg and N.T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1999), 18.

14. N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2006), 140. "Jesus exploded into the life of ancient Israel—the life of the whole world, in fact—not as a teacher of timeless truths.... All worldviews are challenged to the core by this claim." Cf. Wright, *JVG*, 603.

III. Concluding Thoughts

It could be argued that this first concluding remark should have appeared in the body of the paper, however I think that it is better to make it now with the analysis behind us. Though Wright clearly cites Scripture (which is characteristic in all of his books) and operates from the worldview in which it was generated he fails to see the Bible as anything more than one more sense object that must be interpreted within his critical realist epistemology.

Significant to this point is that Wright describes himself as a narrative theologian. However, Wright distinguishes his own approach by integrating a traditional narrative theology with a historical focus (*NTPG*, 132). The early problem for narrative theologians focused on how statements, which appeal to revelation, can be about both God and history. It would appear that revelation deals with one or the other but not both. George Stroup put the problem this way, "Either its statements are about God and not subject to relativity or theological statements are about historical events and subject to the relativity that pervades all historical judgements."¹² It would be accurate to say that Wright attempts to navigate the theological and historical hurdles Stroup delineated by bringing revelation and history together in an organic way.

This observation appears true from Wright's own hand. Consider what he wrote in, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions*,

I propose, then, a no-holds-barred history on the one hand and a no-holds-barred faith on the other. This, I believe, is to live in the uncomfortable real world, where such things do not shout challenges at each other from behind locked doors but meet, merge, fuse, question each other, uncouple again, swirl around each other, undergird and undermine each other, examine each other's foundations and set about demolishing and deconstructing them, appearing at one moment inseparable and at the next in an embarrassingly public family squabble. This is, after all, inevitable if we reflect on what doing history actually involves, and what faith—the Christian faith, at least—is all about.¹³

Clearly, Scripture, from Wright's perspective, is not the principium externum, nor is revelation, for that matter, the principium gnoscendi.

But if that's the case, and as Wright claims, timeless truths are impossible, then why should anyone believe that the Judeo-Christian worldview is the true one?¹⁴ If within my worldview, which happens to be Christian, I am, as Wright contends, obligated to be aware of my presuppositions and allow others to have theirs, then why should those in other worldviews not be permitted the same courtesy? In fact, if my worldview contains nothing of timeless truth because it is subordinate

to my own subjective judgments, then it seems intrusive and unnecessary to try and convince the Hindi or Buddhist of my particular worldview in the midst of their suffering. The retort is likely to be, “What makes your worldview better than mine?”

Second, there is a sense in which Wright’s construction lacks any real room for justice. When dealing with atonement theories Wright explained why he thought that *Christus Victor* best explains what Jesus accomplished in his death while offering a proviso with regard to other theories. For example, Wright mentions the penal or judicial theory but rather than a Biblical construction Wright simply defines it as “God’s proper ‘No’ to sin expressed on Jesus as Messiah” (*EJG*, 95). But if we’ve read Wright correctly Jesus only took sin upon himself metaphorically.¹⁵ Therefore, God’s no must also be in some sense metaphorical.

So, what comfort does that bring to the victims of 9/11? Wright may argue that vengeance is never comforting. But we are talking about justice not vengeance. Many Biblical characters, old and new, cried out for God’s justice. Where is Wright’s emphasis on this Biblical theme? The closest we come to any form of justice is naming and shaming, but then we are expected to resume an appropriate relationship with the offender. Is that enough for the victims of 9/11? Was that enough for the Psalmist who cried out asking God to dash the little ones of his enemy against a rock (Psalm 137:9)? What is more, justice will not come even in the next life. According to Wright, those who continually refuse God’s love and way of life will in the end be “beings that once were human but now are not.”¹⁶

This second point is indicative of another element present throughout Wright’s treatment of evil. He seems to bend texts in order to define the supernatural out of existence. Thus, evil is reduced to something this worldly. Another example of this comes out clearly in Wright’s analysis of the petition “deliver us from evil.” For Wright, this petition means, in part, that we learn to forgive ourselves, both for our own sake and for the sake of those around us (*EJG*, 163). It appears that Wright thinks that the best way to usher in the new creation is to start with us, not a bad idea. However, it doesn’t appear that Wright has more than psychology to offer. We forgive ourselves so that it will be easier for us to forgive and for others to offer the same gift to us.

Wright began his book with victims, victims in New York, Washington, the Indian Ocean, New Orleans, the Gulf Coast, Pakistan and Kashmir. And in a sense, he ends with victims. His heart is with those who suffer. But all that has gone between provides little comfort to those who suffer and desire justice for their departed loved ones, let alone God himself.

Clearly, it appears that Wright has tried to avoid giving us rehashed philosophical conundrums and theological

distinctions but at the cost of a suitable answer. He has left us feeling dissatisfied. We expected a thoroughgoing treatment of evil, especially of the forces of evil and chaos deep inside of us but instead we were treated to a tepid analysis of the problem and a reheated solution straight out of old liberal theology.■

Review: Richard C. Barcellos, *The Lord’s Supper as a Means of Grace: More than a Memory* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2013). 128 pages. ISBN 978-1-78191-268-3. \$16.99 (paperback). Reviewed by Dr. G. Stephen Weaver, Jr., Fellow and Research Assistant at the Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The Lord’s Supper as a Means of Grace is not intended to offer an exhaustive treatment of the Lord’s Supper but simply to address, as the title suggests, the question, “How is the Lord’s Supper a means of grace?” (16). This has been an issue that has long been disputed in Baptist life and Barcellos has written this book in order to correct the contemporary Baptist view by declaring the Supper to be, in the words of the subtitle, “More than a Memory.” However, this book has usefulness beyond any Baptist intramural disputes on the Lord’s Supper. Barcellos’ teaching reflects the rich Reformed heritage and serves as a helpful introduction to the Reformed view of the Lord’s Supper.

Barcellos begins his work with an introduction that outlines both his purpose in writing the book and his methodology in developing his argument. The purpose is to show that the Lord’s Supper is in fact a means of grace and to explain how exactly the Lord’s Supper functions in this way. In regards to methodology, Barcellos elects to begin with the biblical evidence before proceeding to how the confessions and catechisms in the Reformed tradition have formulated the teaching. In chapter one, Barcellos offers a brief survey of the variety of language used in the New Testament in association with the Lord’s Supper. Each of the terms surveyed provide nuance to the New Testament understanding of the Supper. Terms such as “the giving of thanks,” “the breaking of bread,” “sharing in the blood and body of Christ,” “the cup and table of the Lord,” and of course, “the Lord’s Supper” are explored for their distinct contributions to the meaning and purpose of the sacrament. Barcellos rightly views the understanding of these terms as foundational for a proper understanding of the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper.

15. Of course Wright would contend that metaphor isn’t devoid of literal meaning. However, that would simply mean that Jesus was the object of Roman wrath, Jewish anger, socio-political tensions, etc. but it doesn’t mean that there was a transaction or imputation of humanity’s sin to Christ.

16. Wright, *Surprised By Hope* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 182.

In chapters two through four, Barcellos develops three important aspects of his argument that the Lord's Supper should be seen as a means of grace. The primary biblical focus in these three chapters is limited to two letters of Paul, namely, 1 Corinthians and Ephesians. The choice of Paul's epistles is natural since, as Barcellos notes, "Paul is the theologian of the application of redemption" (41). 1 Corinthians and Ephesians were chosen because they contain the most extensive teaching on the Lord's Supper as communion with Christ and the way in which the Holy Spirit communicates spiritual blessings to believers. Specifically, chapter two offers a detailed study of 1 Corinthians 10:16 in its context, which Barcellos calls "the most important text in Paul which speaks about the nature of the Lord's Supper" (42). The meaning of the Greek word for "fellowship" (Gk. *koinonia*) is vital to this discussion. After a thorough analysis of the meaning of the word, Barcellos concludes that the elements of the Supper "are signs which signify present participation or present communion in the present benefits procured by Christ's body and blood" (52). This, Barcellos adds, "means spiritual nourishment is brought to souls," which is another way of saying the Supper is a means of grace (53).

Chapter three begins to explain how the spiritual nourishment described in chapter two is administered to believers. Barcellos draws on Ephesians 1:3–14 to show that the Holy Spirit communicates heavenly blessings to believers on earth. The Spirit is the means by which the benefits of Christ's redemptive work are applied to believers. In this way the Spirit brings spiritual nourishment to the believer partaking of the Lord's Supper. Barcellos summarizes, "Ephesians 1:3 supplies us with the theological mechanics which are assumed by 1 Corinthians 10:16" (71). In other words, the Holy Spirit applies the spiritual blessing of fellowship with Christ as the believer partakes of the Supper.

In chapter four, Barcellos develops how Paul prayed for believers to receive spiritual invigoration in Ephesians 3:14–21. The detailed exposition of Paul's prayer demonstrates that prayer itself is a means of God's grace. Paul prays that God's grace might be spiritually experienced by the Ephesians. All the benefits granted to believers by the Father are said to be "through His Spirit." Because the minister prays as he administers the Lord's Supper, the same spiritual work prayed for by Paul is available when the sacrament is accompanied by the prayer of faith: "Both the Lord's Supper and prayer are means of grace through which the Spirit of God brings soul-nourishing and faith-strengthening blessings from heaven to Christ's people on the earth by the blessing of God" (85).

The fifth chapter shows that the theological conclusions drawn from the exegesis of the essential New Testament texts on the Lord's Supper and the Spirit's work to administer spiritual blessings were affirmed in the confessions and

catechisms of the Reformed tradition. The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century creedal formulations overwhelmingly describe the Supper as a means of grace. Barcellos surveys the Belgic Confession (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Westminster Confession (1647), the Second London Confession (1677/89), the Orthodox Catechism (1680), the Shorter Catechism, and the Baptist Catechism. All of these confessions and catechisms teach that the Lord's Supper is a means of grace. The exegetical and theological assertions made by Barcellos in chapters two through four are confirmed by an examination of the Reformed creedal tradition. These documents assert that "the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a faith-nourishing, outward ordinance" and the "Spirit of Christ takes the benefits of Christ and brings them to elect and believing souls on the earth" (101). As Barcellos acknowledges, either these confessions and catechisms have interpreted Scripture correctly or not. There is no doubt, however, that the Reformed confessions and creeds of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (including those by Particular Baptists) described the Lord's Supper as a means of grace.

In the sixth and final chapter, Barcellos briefly reviews the argument and methodology of the book before turning to provide some theological musings and practical implications of the book's teaching on the Lord's Supper. He argues that the theology of the Lord's Supper presented is clearly Trinitarian, shows a robustly pneumatological understanding of the Supper, and assumes the primacy of Scripture as the chief means of grace. Barcellos concludes with four practical and pastoral implications of this teaching on the Lord's Supper for local church ministry. These implications include the need for churches to consider seriously their attitude during the Supper and to think seriously about the frequency of the Supper.

Although written by a Reformed Baptist to combat the reduction of the Lord's Supper as merely a memorial in contemporary Baptist life, this book will prove useful to any in the Reformed tradition who desire a helpful introduction to the Lord's Supper as a means of grace. Barcellos has written in a clear style that allows the reader constantly to know where exactly they are in the argument of the book. Each chapter stands alone, but also contributes to the overall thesis. One could fault the book for not being an exhaustive treatment of the biblical teaching on the Lord's Supper, but this would be to misunderstand the author's intention of providing an introduction to the specific question of whether the Lord's Supper is a means of grace or not. The small size and direct approach are perfectly fitted to this purpose. This book should be read by all who desire to understand the Reformed view of the Lord's Supper as a means of grace. Those already holding to this view will find this volume to be a useful tool to use for introducing others to this soul-nourishing doctrine for the first time. ■

Review: Bradley J. Longfield, *Presbyterians and American Culture: A History* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 2013). 262 pp. \$30.00. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-66423-156-9. Reviewed by D. G. Hart, author of *Calvinism: A History* (Yale University Press, 2013).

If readers wanted a book to diagnose the fundamental affliction of mainline Protestants in the United States, Bradley J. Longfield's *Presbyterians and American Culture* may be it. The mainline has since the early years of the American republic been deeply involved in trying to Christianize America, first with the reformist voluntary associations of the Second Great Awakening, then with the Social Gospel, later with the theological adaptations involved in liberal theology, and also with the ecumenical attempts to unify the largest denominations into one large American Protestant church. These endeavors have produced a set of Protestant politicians, thinkers, activists and many more who allow the mainline churches to take credit for influencing American society in positive ways. At the same time, such influence has compromised the Christian identity of the mainline churches. By being so preoccupied with adjudicating the inequalities and injustices of public life and adapting Christian teaching to address those struggles, the mainline churches have also lost many of those markers of Christian identity that set the church apart from the world.

The lesson of twentieth-century mainline Protestantism is the inverse relationship between influencing the culture and being influenced by it. If the norms of church life—standards for membership, ordination, worship, and catechesis—were the same as those for American society, a church's posture in the public square could look downright theocratic with only Christians qualifying as citizens. But if humanitarian relief or social activism or political ideals of equality and tolerance wind up defining the nature of Christianity, then doctrinal, liturgical, or governmental aspects of church life look narrow, irrelevant, or trivial compared to the demands of public life. For this reason, the second word of Longfield's title—and—may be the most revealing. It is not Presbyterian or American culture, or Presbyterians in American culture, or Presbyterians against American culture, or even Presbyterians for American culture. The word *and* connotes that the Presbyterians included in Longfield's narrative are going to try to be both Presbyterian and American. Although that is an effort that involves every Presbyterian—whether mainline or sideline—in having some firm notion of what these religious and political identities are and what to do if they conflict; this is a matter that Longfield largely suppresses. Indeed, his introductory framing of the book is indicative of his ambivalence: because Presbyterians have been “so influential in shaping the religious and cultural landscape of this nation,” they provide an “illuminating” case for studying the way Christians “have

influenced and been influenced by the culture in the last three hundred years” (xiii).

Longfield might have given readers a better idea of the direction of influence—whether Presbyterians on America or American on Presbyterians—if he had defined *Presbyterian* or *American*. For instance, in his discussion of the colonial disputes over the First Great Awakening that split the American church between Old Side and New Side synods, Longfield notes the importance of the Westminster Confession and confessional subscription among those ministers who opposed revivals. He also discusses the formation of the first General Assembly in the 1780s and the efforts of ministers to institute the rule by elders at all levels of church life. In addition, Longfield is not silent about the importance of Sabbath observance at least in the various social reforms that American Presbyterians championed during the nineteenth century. But none of these subjects—creed, polity, or Sabbatarianism—become a standard by which Longfield evaluates whether or not the church lost its way. They are simply ideals that one part of the American Presbyterian church championed.

Conversely, Longfield only implicitly attempts to discern those traits that characterized American society. For instance, after the war for independence various state legislatures along with Congress considered proposals to disestablish religion and make churches voluntary. Adapting to these newly conceived relations between church and state would eventually lead American Presbyterians to revise the Confession on the duties of the civil magistrate. But rather than discuss the changing circumstances of Presbyterian witness that American posed—compared to Ireland or Scotland—Longfield gives virtually no attention to the eighteenth-century creedal revisions that reduced the magistrate's authority in relation to the church.

Longfield's larger narrative in which readers will need to discern the relations between Presbyterians and America follows a familiar sequence. It begins with the mélange of Presbyterians who formed the first presbytery (Philadelphia in 1716) and slowly added presbyteries and synods as more colonists (largely from Ireland or Scotland) arrived. When these Presbyterians confronted the arrival of an Englishman, the remarkably gifted public speaker and Anglican priest, George Whitefield, they split into pro- and anti-revivalist parties. These two branches of the colonial church remained separate between 1745 and 1758. But to pro-revival Presbyterians belonged the important achievement in 1746 of starting a college dedicated to the awakenings. This institution, the College of New Jersey (Princeton University), was arguably the first institution in which Presbyterians negotiated the relationship between faith and culture.

Princeton would continue during the revolutionary war to be the site where Presbyterians continued to establish their

American identity. In 1786 the College of New Jersey welcomed the Scottish Presbyterian minister, John Witherspoon, as its new president. Although a new arrival to the British colonies, Witherspoon soon threw himself into colonial politics and became the only minister to sign the Declaration of Independence. His reform of the college curriculum was also responsible for shifting the interests of alumni away from the Presbyterian ministry and into public service. James Madison, the fourth president of the United States, was part of the 1771 graduating class. At the same time that Witherspoon elevated the stature of Presbyterians in politics, he was also active as a churchman. He took the lead in revising the Presbyterian Church's government and confession which were part of the steps toward the 1789 formation of the General Assembly and the adoption of the denominational name, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. The political profile of the college under Witherspoon and his son-in-law, Samuel Stanhope Smith, would eventually prompt church leaders to found a seminary dedicated exclusively to the training of pastors. Princeton Theological Seminary, formed in 1812, was the Presbyterian Church's first theological institution under the oversight of the General Assembly. It was also located in a town familiar to Presbyterian institution builders.

With the start of Princeton Seminary, Longfield's narrative shifts away from Presbyterian efforts to create separate institutions through which they could pass on the faith to Presbyterian involvement in various political and social causes. Indeed, Presbyterians cooperated with and in many cases led the way in forming voluntary (or parachurch) organizations from the 1810s on that were designed to establish a Christian social order. These organizations spanned the efforts of Sunday school for poor children to societies designed to eradicate social evils such as slavery, drunkenness and Sabbath observance. This so-called Benevolent Empire was the catalyst for Protestants of British descent, from Baptists to Episcopalians, to forge the networks out of which would emerge the mainline churches. It also tempted Protestants (including Presbyterians) to overlook doctrinal, liturgical, and ecclesiological differences for the sake of a public faith (read civil religion) that would bind together all Americans (except Roman Catholics, Mormons and other minorities). The tension between public Protestantism and conservative Presbyterianism split the Presbyterian Church again in 1837 between the Old School and New School branches.

After the Civil War in 1869 when the Old and New Schools reunited, Presbyterians and American culture entered a phase that required even less negotiation. The church, as Longfield shows, included a varied cast of characters. In the political realm, Presbyterian statesmen such as Woodrow Wilson during World War I and John Foster Dulles (during the Cold War) justified American foreign policy in the language of Christian

ideals. Presbyterians, such as Charles Stetzel, advanced the cause of the Social Gospel in programs designed to humanize the nation's economy. In intellectual life, James Woodrow prompted controversy by attempting to harmonize Christianity and evolution; William Jennings Bryan, a Presbyterian layman spoke from the other side of the aisle and led the prosecution at the Scopes Trial to keep evolution out of public schools. Presbyterian women, such as Jean Kenyon Mackenzie, were active in foreign missions, and also left their mark, as in the case of Henrietta Mears, in the domain of widely popular Sunday school curricula. Meanwhile, Presbyterians also attempted to preserve the old-time faith, whether through the revivals led by Billy Sunday or the battles with modernism conducted by J. Gresham Machen.

If Longfield had attempted to show that American Presbyterians were like the Israelites when everyone did what was right in his or her own eyes, he succeeded. His book gives the distinct impression that what held these disparate endeavors together was the word, "Presbyterian." But what the church did either to be faithful to its doctrinal standards or how it tried to herd these Presbyterian cats seldom gains Longfield's attention. Sometimes, such as during the fundamentalist controversy, Presbyterians tried to find the same page. But after World War II, the Presbyterian Church increasingly fractured around such contentious issues as the new evangelicalism, higher education, the ordination of women, civil rights, and ecumenism. Longfield concludes his narrative with the poignant observation—which could well have applied to the Presbyterian Church one century earlier—that "[m]ore and more the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) would find itself struggling with issues of boundaries and identity. . ." (199) Such lack of clarity coincided with a decline in membership (50 percent since 1965), budget shortfalls, and the closing of congregations.

In his epilogue, Longfield uses the recent analysis of Joseph Small to conclude that American Presbyterians have become captive to "American-style democracy" rather than adhering to the distinct convictions of a community of faith. He even reminds his readers about the importance of faithfulness. In every period, the church must "seek to discern what in its life is congruent with the gospel, what of an alien nature might have been assimilated from its host culture, and how it needs to reform in the light of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ" (203). That is indeed a worthy reminder of the church's calling and the stakes involved in her ministry. The question that hovers over this book, however, is whether Longfield as historian is willing to help his fellow Presbyterians understand where in the past the church many have assimilated more from America than from its theological and ecclesiological heritage. If he knows that faithfulness sometimes requires resisting cultural developments, then he might have also detected

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of the church is not the answer to the social transformation approach to ecclesial ministry, though some have made this argument. For example, PCA Pastor Charles Dunahoo writes,

The marks of the true church are not seen in the starting of hospitals, or running shelters for the homeless, or picketing or lobbying for social justice. While those may be things that Christians should do and support, that does not equate with defining the mission of the church. Proclamation, witness, and disciple making best define the church's mission. Those must have priority and if some of the other things suggested above are included in the church's life, referring to the institutional church, they must be justified as supporting its primary mission of disciple-making ... The challenge for church leadership ... is to keep the main thing the church's main thing, and what is that? Making disciples, preaching Christ and him crucified, equipping the saints for their work in ministry both in and out of the church.⁴⁴

Again, *leitourgia* is strangely missing from these remarks as it is in Redeemer's mission statement. Surely, no church in the PCA has eliminated *leitourgia* from its understanding of ministry, yet there are some who centralize or absolutize some other form of ministry (such as mercy ministry or evangelism), and this will ultimately reorient them away from their primary calling.

By exploring the liturgical nature of the church, the liturgical nature of the office of believer and the liturgical nature of pastoral ministry, we have demonstrated that all ecclesial ministry is *leitourgia*. Worship is the foundation of all ministry and the fount from which all ministry flows. We have further demonstrated the inseparable relationship between ecclesiology and ministry. What the church *is* determines what the church *does*. Ecclesiology and ministry are mutually formative. Hence, the ministry of the church must have the same nature and orientation as the church itself. A liturgically oriented theology of ministry is entirely consistent with Reformed ecclesiology. It is a ministry that is in keeping with the true nature of the church as a covenantal and eschatological entity. For a church to be truly Reformed, it needs a theology of ministry that is explicitly and undeniably consistent with Reformed ecclesiology. It must have a ministry that is inherently and pervasively *leitourgia*, for the chief end of the church and of every act of ministry is to glorify God.■

44. <http://www.pcacdm.org/what-is-the-mission-of-the-church-making-sense-of-social-justice-shalom-and-the-great-commission/>

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different episodes (for instance, the revolutionary war) when Presbyterians were following the culture rather than leading. And that may be the besetting sin of mainline Presbyterianism—namely, haunted by the fear of engaging in sectarian or intolerant modes of Christian expression, they suppressed the ideal of faithfulness for the strategy of having a place at American culture's table. Longfield suggests that this strategy was ultimately a failure. However, he also backs away from calling it such. For that reason, his book on Presbyterians and American culture will console mainline Presbyterians about the good old days of cultural prominence and remind confessional Presbyterians of worldliness' dangers.■

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to make use of those resources, bending them all in service of David's destruction. David is keenly aware, as he told Jonathan his confidant, that "...truly as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death." (1 Sam. 20:3) He has been hotly pursued by Saul, and certainly this was not his expectation when Samuel poured the anointing oil upon him, by the Word of the Lord, anointing him to be the next king, in the room of Saul. He has dwelt in forests, caves, in the land of the enemies of Israel, and away from the public worship of God, which as the 10th generation from Pharez was a special grief to him (Deut. 23:2; Ruth 4:18–22), which is seen in many of David's Psalms (e.g. Pss. 26:8, 27:4, 63:1–3, 68:24, to reverence but a few). But in the midst of all of this David remains fixed upon God and His promises, steadfast and unmoved. He declares that he will take refuge in God until these afflictions are over. Note that he has an unshakeable hope—that wonderful word "until"! There is an end to affliction, and there is a refuge during affliction. The refuge is established so that we might be able to bear up under the affliction, and the end of the affliction is declared so that we might continue in hope, fixed and steadfast upon the promises and Covenant of God Himself, and in Christ, in whom all the promises of God are yea, and amen (1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 1:20). This is no mental sleight-of-hand, no pretense, and no eastern-mystical paradox that good is really bad, and bad is really good, etc. This is a very human difficulty, and a very human response, from one who has a heart of faith, and looks to Christ for salvation.

As such, it is an example to all sufferers in the Lord. Note David's confidence: God shall send forth his mercy and truth (vv 3; 10). "Mercy and Truth" is a shorthand Old Testament phrase denoting the saints' understanding of the Gospel itself. The mercy is that covenant fidelity, faithfulness of God to all His promises in Christ Jesus. The truth spoken of is the truth of His Word, the proclamations of what God will do for His people in forgiveness, mercy, favor, grace, provision,