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The New Testament and the people of God

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problem. In the Appendix Wenham acknowledges that considerable tension did exist in the early church. He agrees with Dunn that theology was in a state of flux and that "there was not a single worked-out orthodoxy in the New Testament period" (p. 716). He even seems ready to concede that authentic Christian faith can express itself in several different theologies, as redaction-critical studies indicate (p. 686). But he cannot agree with Dunn that "certain New Testament authors deliberately reject the ideas and views of other New Testament authors" (p. 686). To do so would call into question the doctrine of the divine inspiration of scripture. Wenham prefers to think that "the evidence of diversity is far less than has often been suggested" (p. 702).

In this reviewer's opinion Ladd's *New Testament Theology* is a very valuable resource for the intended audience. The reader would be well advised, however, to make extensive use of the ample bibliographies in order to get a fuller picture of the views which Ladd and his revisers reject. The issues are much more complex than even the much improved revision of Ladd's book suggests. Little wonder that so few scholars attempt to write a *New Testament theology*! Ladd and his revisers deserve credit and thanks for tackling so momentous a task.

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The New Testament and the People of God

Nicholas T. Wright

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989

476 pp.

The subject of Christian origins has been a lively academic arena ever since the horrors of the Holocaust shocked theologians into probing what there is in our Christian inheritance that might possibly have contributed to this tragedy.

N.T. Wright has taken upon himself the task of developing "a consistent hypothesis on the origin of Christianity" (p. xiv), and he gallops into this arena with the combativeness of a jousting knight. But Wright is not playing games. The metaphor of warfare is his own choice to describe this debate (p. 3) and it is not fanciful to portray this first volume of a planned five-volume project as a counter-attack, using hand-to-hand combat against most recent scholarship. (The bibliography is 27 pages long!)

In Part I, the author introduces the questions to be addressed: "(1) How did Christianity begin, and why did it take the shape that it did? and (2) What does Christianity believe, and does it make sense?" (p. 10) He then sketches contemporary critical methods in each of the fields of

theology, history and literature, and explains his own stance toward them, arguing that critical methods, rightly used, can produce positive results. He wants us to know he is no obscurantist.

Part II contains a careful analysis of these critical methods, as well as a section on epistemology. Wright's intention is to produce an integrated and thorough argument that anticipates every objection and disarms any potential critic. Hence, he begins at the beginning with the fundamental question of the possibility of knowledge, to which his answer is "critical realism", a position somewhere between uncritical naivete and weary scepticism.

After this analysis of methods, Wright begins to apply them to "First Century Judaism Within the Greco-Roman World" (Part III) and "The First Christian Century" (Part IV).

Israel in the first century, Wright says, was preoccupied with the "smaller story" of Israel's long "exile" as a subject people, and of its hope for rescue and vindication through the messianic promise. The Christian church was (and is) telling the *same* story, except with a new ending which brings the smaller story into the larger story of God's great plan for the whole world. Unfortunately, "For many Jews it was the smaller story that occupied their minds." In other words, Judaism, in continuing to define itself within the "smaller story", was (and is) stuck in an obsession with its own identity. The church now "owns" their story because the church has heard God's saving purpose not only through the history of Israel but especially in that history's climax—the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. (The title of a volume of essays by Wright is "The Climax of the Covenant".)

It is not a new thing to confront a supercessionist reading of the New Testament; it is something my generation grew up with and it is still a part of every child's Sunday School learning. But it takes one's breath away to read such an abrasive version of it from a reputable New Testament scholar in these post-Holocaust times. Wright begins his argument with the parable of the unfaithful tenants (p. 6) and its pointed ending: "(The LORD) will come and destroy those tenants and give the vinyard to others." The rest of his book is really a commentary on this parable, filling in the historical details that finally end in the seventh decade of the first century: "the means by which the owner (Israel's God) will come himself and destroy the tenants will turn out to be military action taken by Rome" (p. 76). The vineyard belongs to the church.

That this conclusion is more than a judgment based on evidence is betrayed by Wright's veiled, gratuitous insults against Israel, both ancient and modern: "If the tenants had heeded the owner's instructions, there would have been no dispute about the vineyard. If the children of Israel had heeded the Deuteronomic warnings, there would have been more milk and honey, and less misery and injustice, when they eventually crossed the Jordan" (p. 28). In addition there is Wright's pointed dismissal of the convention of capitalizing the word God. Israel's god is demoted to the generic pantheon, while the true God, deserving the distinction of a capital letter, is revealed only in Jesus and worshipped only in the Christian church.

Wright does refer once to the Holocaust, acknowledging its impact on contemporary scholarship, without, however, using the word nor acknowledging Christian culpability over 1500 years. Instead, the Holocaust was "a moment of great and tragic need", and the church allowed its misconceptions of Judaism "to hull it into passivity". In the end, he dismisses Christian soul-searching as a temporary, if necessary, "reaction". "Christian scholarship is in the middle of a long-drawn-out process of repentance for having cherished false views about Judaism... How long it will be before things settle down again it is difficult to say... But the historical task cannot be accomplished by the back-projection of modern guilt feelings" (p. 148).

If Wright's project can be used as a warning of the consequences of doing business as usual in the church's theological enterprise, it deserves a close reading. But if it is just one more cushion for Christian complacency, then Fortress Press, which has done so much for Christian-Jewish dialogue in the past, has here made a serious mistake.

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On the Highest Good

Friedrich Schleiermacher

Translated and Annotated with a Scholarly Postscript by H. Victor Froese

Schleiermacher: Studies-and-Translations, Volume 10

Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992

iv + 149pp

With this volume The Edwin Mellen Press continues its commitment to make the works of Schleiermacher available in English translation. The translations are based on the new *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* being published by Walter de Gruyter of Berlin. Edwin Mellen is to be commended for taking up this long-overdue project, which will prove a benefit to all English-speaking Schleiermacher scholars, whether they read the original German or not. This is especially the case because of the annotations and introductions or postscripts which accompany the translations. The present volume, translated by H. Victor Froese, not only provides us with a very readable English rendering of a difficult German text, but also with a valuable 75-page postscript by the translator.

Schleiermacher's early essay (1789), *On the Highest Good*, was never published in his lifetime, and in the large scheme of his theological works is