

*Christian Doctrine in Global Perspective* (2008); and commentaries on *Deuteronomy* (1996) and *Ezekiel* (2001).

When one is confronted with a book that is two inches thick and nearly 600 pages long, the idea of reading it from cover to cover seems daunting. However, *The Mission of God* draws the reader in with well-explained, significant goals and with the subsequent material presented within elegantly crafted paragraphs. Each chapter is carefully thought out and clearly presents the different aspects undergirding Wright's main thesis: God's mission is to redeem and reclaim the whole created order. God then invites us to be coworkers with him. It takes 581 pages for Wright to develop "the massive contours of this Bible-sculpted, God-centered, mission-driven vision of reality" (533). Thankfully, the publisher formats Wright's valuable research with footnotes instead of endnotes.

With this tome, Wright embarks on a distinctive "mission." He insists that the book is not the typical mission manual to help Christians become better "missionaries." Rather, he writes, "just as 'salvation belongs to our God' (Rev 7:10), so does mission." The Bible renders and reveals to us the God whose creative and redemptive work is permeated from beginning to end with God's own great mission, his purposeful, sovereign intentionality to bless all nations. "All mission or missions which we initiate, or into which we invest our own vocation, gifts and energies, flow from the prior and larger reality of the mission of God. *God is on mission*" (531).

Wright's passionate argumentation is structured within four main sections: "The Bible and Mission," "The God of Mission," "The People of Mission," and "The Arena of Mission." Having written commentaries on Deuteronomy and Ezekiel, Wright is well versed in OT materials, so it is no surprise that the vast amount of the author's work is in the OT. However, he also ably demonstrates how the parameters of God's mission were understood and utilized by the NT apostles. As he notes, "the whole pattern of Paul's thinking was so shaped by the pattern of the Scriptures that almost any scheme we might devise to map those Scriptures would be seen to be reflected in Paul" (523).

Wright is not deterred by modern scholarly tendencies to get lost in supposedly diverse "traditions" of the canon. He competently engages various scholarly arguments as he works within the parameters of a unified canon thereby making this book appropriate for use as a textbook for both OT and NT theology courses, as well as for classes in systematic theology.

Wright systematically allows God to be portrayed through his own canonical self-revelation. The resultant portrait is glorious and persuasive. The Christian church is indebted to Wright for tackling this major project.

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Wright, N. T. *Evil and the Justice of God*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006. 176 pp. Hardcover, \$18.00.

N. T. Wright is the Anglican Bishop of Durham and a professor of NT studies for 20 years at Cambridge, McGill, and Oxford Universities. He has

been a visiting professor at Harvard Divinity School, Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Gregorian University in Rome, and many other institutions around the world. Wright has authored more than thirty books; his magisterial work *Jesus and the Victory of God* is highly prized.

Despite Wright's almost legendary prominence in NT studies, he begins by rejecting any claim of full expertise on the subject. Twice he acknowledges, "I do not pretend for a moment that I have here a full or even a balanced treatment either of the problem of evil, or more especially of the meaning of Jesus' crucifixion" (10), or make any pretense to have mastered the field (18). Wright's thesis is clearly outlined as he endeavors to provide answers to the question, "What is evil?" The subject he argues in the book is the perception of evil both in the world and in ourselves, and the Christian attempt to understand, critique, and address it. Admittedly, how would a Christian view of evil differ from that of a Buddhist, Hindu, Marxist, or Muslim? In short, Wright's purpose in writing is to provide, in a unique way, a solution to the problem of evil.

The book has five sections. In the first section, Wright defines the new problem of evil by exposing our reaction to it: first, we ignore it when it does not hit us in the face; second, we are surprised by it when it does; and third, we react in immature ways as a result (24). Wright states that evil cannot be eliminated by an act of Congress. Nor can it be by philosophical argument or high explosives.

Wright paints a vivid picture of evil as a present reality in postmodernism and, as such, there is no one to take the blame for it. Consequently, it offers no hope of restoration, no way out, and no chance of repentance. He explores several views of evil: for the Buddhist, the present world is an illusion and the aim of human life is to escape it; for Hindus, evil in the present life is explained in terms of wrong committed in the previous life; for Marxists, the world is moving in a determined way toward the dictatorship of the proletariat; and Muslims teach that the presence of evil in the world is because the message of Allah has not yet spread to all people.

Wright ends the chapter with a threefold observation: the recognition that Western-type democracy is not an automatic solution to the problem of global evil; recognition of the depth-dimension of evil; and the recognition that the line between good and evil does not run between "us" and "them," but through every individual and every society.

In the second chapter, Wright brings God into the picture. He provides answers to the question, "What can God do with evil?" He defines evil as a defacing of the beautiful world God created (32). Evil is the force of anticreation, antilife, the force that 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 (89). Evil is not simply a philosopher's puzzle, but a reality that stalks our streets and damages people's lives, homes, and property (149). Despite the atrocity of evil, there is hope. God will contain and restrain evil and prevent it from doing its work.

Wright dives into biblical material in the search for clues to answer the question, “What can God do with evil?” Although he does not try to explain the source of evil, he nevertheless argues that the Bible offers the story of what God has done, is doing, and will do about evil. He refers to several biblical incidents (tower of Babel, the flood, the forbidden fruit) to point to the fact that the curse came as a result of man’s disobedience. As a result, God judges the pagans who are oppressing Israel and rescues his people. David and his dynasty, he suggests, are God’s answer to the problem of evil. Admittedly, the story of the exile and restoration becomes the great and mysterious answer and ultimately God’s solution to evil.

The third chapter considers “evil and the crucified God.” It answers the question, “Why did Jesus die?” Wright’s quest for a solution to the problem of evil led him to the temple where the regular sacrifices took place. These were constant reminders of both sin and grace. The temple also was a reminder of the death of Jesus on the cross and a part of God’s solution to the problem. The cross remains a call to a different vocation, a new way of dealing with evil, and ultimately a new vision of God. What then, according to Wright, is the role of the gospel?

The Gospels, Wright argues, tell the double stories of how evil in the world—political, social, personal, and emotional—reached its height, and God’s provision for a long-term plan for Israel. Thus the story of Jesus and his death is the climax of the story of Israel. It is the point where political and cosmic evil met together and burned themselves out in killing the Son of God (102).

In the fourth chapter, the author argues that it is the church’s task to implement and anticipate Christ’s achievement through his death on the cross. This double task of implementing the achievement of the cross and anticipating God’s promised future world might play out particularly in the wider world where politicians and the media have suddenly rediscovered the fact of evil but do not know what to do about it. Wright suggests five ways (prayer, holiness, politics and empire, penal codes, and international disputes) that can help bring together the reality of living between the cross and the resurrection on the one hand and the new world on the other.

The exciting and enormous task that lies ahead of us is that we are called not just to understand the problem of evil and the justice of God, but also to be part of the solution to it. How then can the Christian imagination be reeducated so that we can become conscious of living between the victory achieved by Jesus and the ultimate renewal of all things? This question is the subject of the fifth and final chapter, “Deliver Us from Evil.” Wright’s argument is that forgiveness is a central part of deliverance from evil. The author explores this point in relation to the larger problem of evil and what it might mean for us to anticipate this final resolution in our personal and communal lives. God will forgive, and with that forgiveness he will not only release the world from its burden of guilt, but will also, so to speak, release himself from the burden of always having to be angry with a world gone wrong.

Thus the ultimate answer to the problem of evil is to be found in God's creation of a new world, new heavens and earth, with redeemed, renewed human beings ruling over it and bringing to it God's wise, healing order. "Deliver us from evil" means that we learn to forgive ourselves both for our own sake and for the sake of those around us.

God's forgiveness of us, and our forgiveness of others, is the knife that cuts the rope by which anger, fear, recrimination, and death are still attached to us. Evil will have nothing to say at the last, because the victory of the cross will be fully implemented. We do not have to wait for the future to start experiencing our deliverance from evil. We are summoned to start living this way in the present.

One main theme flows throughout the book—finding a solution to the problem of evil. Although the origin of evil remains a mystery, Wright's solution to the problem is within human reach. The solution is not in vain political discourse or in aggressive behavior toward those we disagree with. There are no references (no footnotes or direct quotations) in the early sections of the book until the final chapter, where Wright borrows heavily from Miroslav Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace* and Desmond Tutu's *No Future Without Forgiveness*. His arguments that forgiveness is the key to the life between the "already and the not yet" are significant for the practical Christian life.

Evil is real and Wright offers a practical solution for it. This book may serve as a good introduction to the subject. How easy it is to promote theoretical solutions rather than to offer a practical one! The problem of evil is indeed a challenging one and, consequently, scholars have often provided fragmented and even unrealistic solutions to it. It is, therefore, refreshing to read a book offering practical solutions to a difficult problem such as evil.

*Evil and the Justice of God* is an excellent source of practical solutions within every son's and daughter's reach. Wright has been successful in showing the ineffectiveness of the contemporary popular approach to the problem. But one of the weaknesses of the book lies in what one may call "over-anthropomorphism," e.g., when he writes: "God has to get his boots muddy and, it seems, to get his hands bloody, to put the world back to rights" (59).

The book is well written and easy to read. Wright's purpose is outlined from the beginning and is consistent throughout, providing a practical solution to the problem of evil. We are indebted to Wright for his contribution to this difficult subject of theodicy. Any student interested in the subject will certainly find in this book a good tool to consult. It is an excellent tool for theologians and religion teachers as the book comes to grips with the reality of evil.

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Yon, Marguerite. *The City of Ugarit at Tell Ras Shamra*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006. xvii + 172 pp. Hardcover, \$35.00.

Marguerite Yon is a well-known French archaeologist from Maison de l'Orient, Méditerranéen Université, Lumière-Lyon 2 in Lyon, France. She directed the