

One of the best ways to describe *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* might be to view it as a modern-day prophetic voice urgently inviting the reader to a deep reflection of his or her ideas on this subject, assuming that no ethnic group is immune to prejudice. It is not an invitation to sterile reflection but an invitation to act based on the deep understanding of the problem of human prejudice. This type of reflection is necessary since

by adulthood, researchers have found, most Americans have been exposed to a culture with enough negative messages about African-Americans and other marginalized groups that as much as 80 percent of white Americans hold unconscious bias against black Americans, bias so automatic that it kicks in before a person can process it.... The messaging is so pervasive in American society that a third of black Americans hold anti-black bias against themselves (186–187).

This unfortunate reality keeps the caste system humming among people of every color, creed, and gender. It is also imperative to carry out a deep reflection on race as a mere social construct, given the socioemotional, physical, mental, and financial large-scale impact of racial discrimination.

Reading *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* was an emotional, spiritual, and eye-opening experience. Although some sections of the book are nerve-racking, this book is a must-read, not only for the community and organizational leaders but also for anyone interested in expanding their perspective on the American social, economic, and political landscape. It could also serve as an excellent textbook for educational institutions intentional about training world changers.

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Wright, Christopher J. H. *Here Are Your Gods*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020. viii + 164 pp. Paperback. USD 17.36.

Christopher J. H. Wright, international ministries director of the Langham Partnership and author of many books, including *The Mission of God* (IVP, 2018), has written an insightful and thought-provoking work analyzing idolatry both in the Bible and in the contemporary world. A central idea of the book is expressed in the subtitle, *Faithful Discipleship in Idolatrous Times*. In this book, Wright raises two timely questions: What kind of people should Christians be in a world riddled with all kinds of idolatry? and What does it mean to be a disciple and follower of Jesus Christ in the twenty-first century? Wright suggests that the present culture is not that different in its idolatry than the first-century world of the apostles and Jesus. He also postulates that “the biblical category of idolatry—when it is even considered at all—is often handled or dismissed with shallow understanding and simplistic responses”

(2). In his eight chapters, organized in three sections, Wright explores the deeper, more complex waters of idolatry, both then and now, intending to elevate the awareness of his readers to the singular solution to the problem of today's idolatry: the radical calling of lifting the cross of Christ higher and still higher "in this world of evil, folly, idolatry, and confusion. For it was *in* such a world, and *for* such a world, that Jesus died and rose again, and calls us to follow him" (146).

Wright opens his first section, "The Lord God and Other Gods in the Bible," with an exploration of whether the gods we meet in the Bible were "something or nothing" (3). He concludes that, paradoxically, they were both: they were nothing because they lacked divine existence as the one true living God has, while at the same time, they were "something within the world of the peoples and cultures that named them, worshiped them, subjected themselves to them, or enlisted them in whatever objectives were being pursued by the powerful among men for their own ends" (10). He then introduces another paradox, this one derived from the HB's repeated observation that we are the makers of our gods. We bow to idols fashioned from wood or metal into a likeness that suits us, something that we *know* is not divine. This, Wright notes, is "part of the absurdity of worshiping them" (30). Yet, he concludes, our awareness of their being merely human constructs offers an element of hope: if constructed, they can also be deconstructed. "They are no more durable than the people or empires that make them" (31).

Wright moves on to explore the interface of mission and idolatry, pointing out and investigating the necessity of engaging, exposing, and unmasking the so-called gods of other cultures by identifying and condemning idolatry. The "most fundamental distinction in all reality" (32) is that presented in the creation narrative of Genesis, the distinction between the creator God and creation. He goes on to note that the root of all idolatry is the rejection of "the God-ness of God and the finality of God's moral authority" (34). Particularly helpful in this section of chapter 3 is Wright's four-part categorization of the "gods" that humans worship: (1) things that entice us (35), (2) things we fear (36), (3) things we trust (38), and (4) things we need (39). We worship and seek to placate what we are afraid of, elevate to levels of idolatrous trust things that will give us security, and "seek to manipulate and persuade" anything we think will give us those items we believe are necessary for our well-being and prosperity (41). Wright posits that the only cure for these idolatrous tendencies is to restore a knowledge of the true and living God, the one alone who gives sustenance and protection and, therefore, the one alone worthy of worship.

Closing his first section, Wright concludes that the one true living God "battles against all forms of idolatry and calls us to join him in that conflict" (64) in the hope of restoring all of creation to its original purpose. This battle will include a biblically informed missional approach that understands the manifold ways in which we make gods for ourselves and the forms that these

gods take, as well as our motives for creating and worshipping them. Key to our success, Wright posits, is the understanding of what the Bible says about how idolatry negatively affects humanity.

Wright's second section, "Political Idolatry Then and Now," explores the concept that God rules over the nations and that they rise and fall according to very specific God-originated criteria. From the Bible, Wright traces the sequence of the rise and fall of nations, concluding that "all empires come to an end under the sovereign hand of God" (75). After defining common internal and external factors repeatedly present before the collapse of historic dominant world powers, Wright explores factors present in the dominant powers of today, positing that as we share similar biblically-defined deviations from God's expressed will, we, like they, are standing on unsustainable ground. In the closing chapter of the section, entitled "God in the Political Arena," Wright then proceeds to lay out God's desired standards for public life and office as expressed to Israel. He posits that not only was Israel intended to be a means of delivering God's redemptive blessings to the world but also that it was to be a model of how a nation should function.

As he closes his second section, Wright challenges Christians to engage more with the topic of idolatry. He thinks that Christians have neglected the topic of idolatry, precisely because "we ourselves are unconsciously involved with and sometimes dominated by the false gods of the people around us" (93). As we Christians morally deteriorate, so does our civilization. When we are deeply syncretistic and idolatrous, our civilization will surely reflect this. He concludes by noting three gods of contemporary culture: prosperity (94), national pride (97), and self-exaltation (100). With the realization that Western Christianity and Western civilization stand on the very brink of our judgment for ignoring God's divine directions, Wright then turns to his final section to explore the question of how Christians should live in such a world as this.

The two chapters of the last section, "God's People in an Idolatrous World," close out Wright's timely exploration of biblical and contemporary idolatry. He leads into his final thoughts with the concept that Christians must habitually recognize and reject the gods of this world and "persistently choose the living God instead" (109). They must live by the story of God (110), commit to the mission of God (116), and submit to the reign of God (124). This last point is vital—Wright notes that this means Christians are to reject collusion with political power and wealth (126) yet not withdraw from the world or violently revolt against it (127). Instead, they are to follow Jesus in his way of living, modeling the kingdom of heaven while still surrounded by the idolatrous kingdoms of the earth. They are to imitate "the Jesus of the cross, not the Jesus of Constantine" (128). All of our loyalties, political views, choices, and support are, therefore, to align with God's expressed criteria for his kingdom and not with the kingdoms of this world. "Living in and for the

kingdom of God must mean living a life that is different from the kingdoms of this world” (133).

His final chapter is a call to holiness, a life lived in contradistinction to the values of the surrounding world, and a call to prayer. This life is to be one made attractive by “being filled with goodness, mercy, love, compassion, and justice” in order to be a truly positive influence in the world (135). Christians are to be an integral part *of* society while remaining fundamentally, radically different *from* it (138). In addition to living lives reflecting the will of God, Christians are to live lives of prayer. They are to pray for the entry of God’s will into this world, as taught in the Lord’s Prayer (139). This entails that Christians should pray *for* and *against* those in power—*for* them, so that they will act in ways beneficial to society, and *against* them when they act against God’s standards, values, and priorities (143). Wright closes by noting that when Christians uplift God and his values, Christ and him crucified, they can become influencers in the modern-day Babylon that they find themselves in, helping an idolatrous world come to know the one true living God.

Wright is to be commended for highlighting the nature of modern idolatry and for the thought-provoking idea that we Christians are not as immune to it as we might think. His work is biblically informed, clearly written, logically consistent, and highly readable. Especially provocative is his exploration of the current global political climate in light of the divine denouncement of proud human powers mentioned in Scripture. These previous kingdoms fell short of God’s ideal and so passed from the stage of history.

Given the scale of repeated tragedies within Christendom when leadership chose ways that aligned with non-Kingdom solutions to problems both real and perceived, I very much expected Wright, in his discussion of “things that we trust” (38), to explore, even if briefly and in passing, the implications of implicitly trusting our clergy above and beyond the guidance of Scripture. I believe that this section of *Here Are Your Gods* would only be strengthened by the reminder that within the body of Christ, this version of idolatry is alive and needs to be as equally recognized and rejected as all other false gods are.

*Here Are Your Gods* is a contemporary reminder of the danger of idolatry. The author challenges Christians to consider by whose values they are currently living and reminds them of the eternal values of the true and living God. Incisively written, this is a good read for both Christian scholars and nonspecialists.

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