that some may come to salvation by worshipping Christ in ignorance. Although careful to limit the extent of this 'opaqueness', Helm is surely closer to one of the forms of what many have labelled 'inclusivism'. It may be true that there are more positions than the generally accepted three of pluralism, inclusivism and exclusivism, and Helm does well to defend his standpoint, but more needs to be done with regard to his paradigm.

The final essay is an attempt by Henri Blocher to look at theodicy in the light of the doctrine of hell. He presents a strong criticism of human attempts to deal with the problem of evil, and issues a call to remain within the boundaries of revealed truth. At the same time he is wise to caution against reading into biblical texts misconceptions concerning hell which have almost become orthodoxy, his contentment to remain in the midst of mystery, together with his dismissive attitude towards a theodicy based on human freedom, will not be shared by all.

One major disappointment with the book has nothing to do with its content, but with its presentation and type-setting. It is a shame that such a relevant and vital work should be let down on the production side. Having said that, the other main limitation of the book is inherent in its nature. With such a wide range of material and diversity of topics covered, many questions remain. Evangelicals will be left in no doubt of the significance of these papers, but also left with a lot more thinking to be carried out.

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The New Testament and the People of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 1

N. T. Wright

London: SPCK, 1992, xix + 535, £15.00

RÉSUMÉ

Il s'agit là du premier de cinq volumes en chantier sur la théologie du Nouveau Testament. Les suivants seront consacrés à Jésus, à Paul, et aux Evangiles, avec une conclusion. Ce volume est une introduction.

Il comporte cinq parties:

1) les questions de méthode,

2) la compréhension de la nature littéraire, historique et théologique de l'entreprise au moyen du genre des récits,

3) le judaïsme au sein du monde gréco-romain du premier siècle,

4) le premier siècle chrétien.

5) Une brève conclusion insiste sur le fait que le problème de Dieu est fondamental pour toutes les questions qu'on aborde en rapport avec le Nouveau Testament.

C'est un ouvrage clair et bien écrit, qui sera apprécié des spécialistes comme des étudiants. Il constitue une bonne introduction à bien des questions difficiles, comme l'herméneutique et la critique des formes. Cependant son contenu n'est pas aussi nouveau qu'il le prétend. De plus, il sépare l'histoire, la théologie et la critique littéraire de façon trop rigide et sa propre notion de 'récit' n'est pas maniée avec une précision suffisante. N'empêche que c'est un ouvrage qui stimule la réflexion et qui éveille notre désir de voir les volumes suivants.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dies ist der erste Band einer geplanten fünfbändigen Theologie des Neuen Testaments. Die anderen Bände werden jeweils die Schwerpunkte Jesus, Paulus und die Evangelien behandeln, abschließend mit einer Schlußfolgerung. Dieser Band ist als Einführung gedacht.

Er ist aus fünf Teilen aufgebaut. Der erste Teil behandelt methodologische Fragen. Der zweite Teil versucht das literarische, historische und theologische Wesen des Untersuchungsgegenstands mittels der Kategorie 'Erzählung' (engl. 'story') zu erfassen. Der nächste Abschnitt folgt mit der Behandlung des 'Judentums des ersten Jahrhunderts in seiner griechisch-römischen Umwelt', dann folgt der vierte Teil über 'das erste christliche Jahrhundert'. Der letzte Teil besteht aus einer kurzen Schlußfolgerung, die erklärt, daß die Gottesfrage den meisten, möglicherweise allen anderen Fragen neutestamentlicher Theologie zugrundeliegt.

Dies ist ein klar verständliches, lesenswertes Buch, das Studenten wie Wissenschaftlern gleichermaßen Freude bereiten kann. Viele schwierige Fragestellungen, wie z.B. Hermeneutik und Formgeschichte, werden gut und verständlich eingeführt. Allerdings ist sein Beitrag zur neutestamentlichen Theologie nicht so originell, wie er gerne sein möchte. Darüber hinaus werden Kategorien wie Geschichte, Theologie und literarische Methodik prinzipiell zu stark voneinander losgelöst, während die Kategorie 'Erzählung' zu undifferenziert gebraucht wird. Trotz dieser Anmerkungen handelt es sich um ein stimulierendes Werk, das Appetit macht auf die folgenden Bände.

In an engaging Preface, Wright tells us that he set out to write two books side by side, one on Paul and his theology, and the other on Jesus in his historical context. It dawned on him that the

two were intertwined: both dealt with 'the historical description of events and beliefs in the first century'—though that much could surely be said about, say, a treatment of the Zealots at the time of the Jewish war. In any case, like Topsy the project 'growed', and Wright now envisages five volumes: one each on Jesus, Paul, and the gospels, plus an introduction (the present volume) and a conclusion. Wright's aim is to offer 'a consistent hypothesis on the origin of Christianity', which is, in fact, nothing less than one form of a New Testament theology. But unlike most New Testament theologies, Wright does not intend to control his discussion by inductively studying each New Testament document (though he promises a fair bit of such study). Rather, the main title of the project reveals both its organizational unity and Wright's commitment to the concrete: the organizing centre is the question of God, since, according to Wright, the early Christians 'wrestled with that question more than is usually imagined'.

This first volume, then, is 'basically an exercise in ground-clearing', designed to enable Wright to produce the next three volumes without too much question-begging and without including in those later volumes a lot of this preliminary material. The book is divided into five uneven parts. In the first (pp. 3–28), which is an introduction focusing on method, Wright uses the parable of the wicked tenants as an interpretative venue for four approaches he rejects: the pre-critical, the purely historical, the narrowly theological, and the postmodern. Many of the problems he raises with each approach turn on the tension between a reading that seeks to be normatively Christian and one that seeks to be faithful to history. The Enlightenment has been too shrill in its denunciation of traditional Christianity, and Fundamentalism has been too suspicious of solid historical inquiry. Wright intends to combine the pre-modern emphasis on the authority of the text, the modern emphasis on the text's irreducible integration with history, and the postmodern emphasis on the reading of the text. His entire approach he labels 'critical realism'.

Simultaneously rejecting positivism, the search for timeless truths, and purely subjective readings, Wright devotes the second part (pp. 29–144) to 'a fresh examination of what a contemporary Christian literary, historical and theological project might look like'. Much of this ground is familiar, though it is often freshly put. It is impossible to have 'mere' history; it is impossible to abstract Christian theology from the history of first-century Judaism; merely private readings end in an impossible solipsism, and so forth. In bringing together what contemporary scholarship has often put asunder, Wright emphasises the category of 'story', not only because much of the New Testament tells a 'story' (not least the story of Jesus), but because the Bible itself must be read along such lines: Act 1—Creation; Act 2—Fall; Act 3—Israel; Act 4—Jesus; Act 5—the writing of the New Testament, including the gospels (the first scene of the fifth Act). The last Act also includes hints (1 Corinthians 15, parts of Revelation) of how the 'play' will end.

Because so many of the disputed points turn on one's understanding of first-century history, especially between AD30 and AD70, Wright devotes the next two sections to a study of 'First-Century Judaism within the Greco-Roman World' (Part III, pp. 145–338) and of 'The First Christian Century' (Part IV, pp. 339–464) respectively. In the first, Wright's aim is to 'uncover the *worldview* of second-temple Judaism'. While seeking to be fair to Judaism's diversity, Wright arrives at Judaism's characteristic beliefs (monotheism, election, and eschatology) and characteristic hope. The presentation of the latter includes sensible comments on apocalyptic, the messiah, and future life. Wright is of course aware that many students of Judaism judge it inappropriate to speak of characteristic Jewish 'beliefs', on the grounds that for most first-century Jews the identifying patterns of life were not so much beliefs as rituals, values, cultural badges. But Wright insists that these things betray entrenched 'worldviews', and it is these worldviews that Jesus and Paul sought to redefine.

As for 'The First Christian Century', Wright's intention is to lay out the contours of early Christian history, especially (but not exclusively) from AD30 to AD70, without appealing to either Jesus or Paul—though he acknowledges that this is a little like trying to describe European music between 1750 and 1850 without appealing to Beethoven or Mozart. His concern is to set out the matrix of reality in which Jesus and Paul must be interpreted (in later volumes). He proceeds along three axes. On the axis of history, he picks out nine assured facts, beginning with the crucifixion of Jesus and ending with the martyrdom of Polycarp. Turning to praxis, he offers a brief study of mission, sacraments, worship with reference to Jesus, a new ethic, the absence of sacrifice, and martyrdom. The third axis is the study of symbols: the cross, mission, the church, codes of personal behaviour, Jesus as embodying the presence of God, early creeds, and martyrs. From these elements he begins his construction of the 'Christian worldview'. He soon finds that the sketch can only be filled out by appealing to the stories Christians told. He therefore surveys in turn the 'longer stories' told by the synoptic

evangelists, more briefly summarizes the 'stories' told by Paul, Hebrews, and John, and ends with the short stories called up by a 'revised form criticism'. He concludes this survey with an examination of 'Stories but no Story?', i.e. Q and the Gospel of Thomas. Wright doubts that the Q-hypothesis is valid, and dismisses Thomas as a 'subversion' of first-century Christianity into 'a quite different sort of religion'. This fourth Part of the book ends with Wright's outline of the worldview of early Christians, especially with respect to their understanding of God. They believed that the Jewish hope had already been fulfilled in the coming of Jesus, though they left a place for a future coming of Jesus. Because Wright interprets apocalyptic as primarily metaphorical and focused on this world, he rejects the common argument that the delay of the parousia constituted a major problem for the early church.

Part V (pp. 467–476) serves as a conclusion, returning to 'The New Testament and the Question of God'. By the end of the first century, two separate communities, the Jewish and the Christian, having sprung up from the one root, had developed two disparate self-understandings, two disparate ways of reading Scripture, two disparate understandings of God. Why? The three focal points for debate are Jesus (the concern of the historian), the New Testament documents (the concern of the literary critic), and the question of God (the concern of the theologian). Wright again attempts to bring these together, judging the latter to be foundational: 'The question of god (*sic*—one of Wright's orthographical predilections], though conspicuous by its absence from the great majority of books about the New Testament, is in fact the question which lies at the root of most if not all of the issues which are more frequently discussed'. As Christianity develops in the first century, it is clear that new claims are being made 'at this fundamental level', affecting not only language but symbol and praxis, 'not least the symbolic praxis of reading the Jewish scriptures in a new way'.

There is a useful appendix offering a 'Chronological Chart of Second-Temple Jewish History and of Early Christianity'.

Despite its length and erudition, this book is extraordinarily lucid. Both senior scholars and first-degree theologians can follow its arguments, revel in the fine English style and delight in the many colourful similes and analogies. Some sections of the book would serve as an excellent introduction to convoluted and disputed topics—not least the sections on hermeneutical theory and form criticism. Certainly the sustained argument of the entire work is winsome, and whets one's appetite for the remaining four volumes.

Of the various hesitations I have about the book, perhaps I should mention three. First, despite the form in which it is cast, this work is not nearly as novel as it purports to be. In some ways, of course, that is a good thing: studies in theology and biblical studies that are entirely novel are almost always wrong-headed to an equal extent. But this book, to a quite unacceptable degree, resorts to the kind of argument Kissinger describes in *The White House Years*: wherever bureaucrats are asked to list three or four alternative policies for their political masters, they invariably produce a list that describes twits to the left and twits to the right, with the safe, 'recommended' policy the sensible thing in the middle. Similarly, Wright is constantly describing what he does not like on the left and the right (though of course he does not use the categories 'left' and 'right'), and then says, 'My proposal is . . .' or 'I suggest that . . .' or 'My suggestion is that . . .' or the like. This invariably sounds as if the recommended stance is both the sensible *via media* and entirely novel; in reality, it is pretty often the former and almost never the latter. For instance, although he emphasises the linkage among history, theology, and literary sensitivity, and although his efforts to cast the discussion in just this way are his own, freshly minted and much appreciated, yet at the same time, the best exegetes among believing and capable scholars have resorted to all three dimensions for a long time. It would have been helpful, not to say more humble, if this book had pointed out how Wright's synthesis meshes with the work of some others.

Second, occasionally the controlling paradigm —the concern to integrate the three foci, viz. history, theology, and literary criticism—leads to reductionistic analyses. Thus in the concluding chapter, history is tied to the study of Jesus, theology to the question of God, and literary criticism to the New Testament. But one cannot legitimately approach the challenges of the study of the historical Jesus apart from sensitive literary readings of the New Testament and theological reflection on the knowledge of God presupposed by Jesus' contemporaries; one cannot long or profitably engage in theological reflection on God apart from literary appreciation of the Old Testament Scriptures, and sober study of the nature of the history those Scriptures claim to present; one cannot engage in the literary study of the New Testament at anything beyond the most pathetic reductionism without simultaneously reflecting on the ways in which different literary forms structure our theology of God, and our grasp of the *historical* Jesus. In the work as a whole, of course, Wright shows he appreciates these points; all the more remarkable, then, that

in the closing chapter Jesus, God, and the New Testament documents are so disjunctively allotted their respective fields.

Third, perhaps least penetrating is Wright's handling of the category of 'story'. This is not because he is wrong, but because his treatment of the Bible's 'story', of Jesus' 'story' and of the 'little stories' within the New Testament, is so undiscriminating that almost all new Testament scholars could cautiously agree with Wright, but not with one another. How is Wright's 'story' related to 'salvation history' (in the various meanings ascribed to that expression)? Which of the standard criticisms of 'salvation history' might apply to Wright's 'story'? What criteria have enabled Wright to construct the five 'Acts' that constitute the Bible's story? I am more than happy with his second 'Act', viz. the Fall; but many are not, and some who are will interpret it as a purely *theological* category in the Bible's story-line, without any space–time referent. Many related questions cry out for additional comments.

Perhaps Wright will clarify some of these matters in the later volumes of the series. If they are as stimulating, as informed and as clearly written as this one, all of us will profit greatly.

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The Spirit of Hinduism, A Christian perspective on Hindu thought

David Burnett

Tunbridge Wells: Monarch, 1992, 286 pp., £8.99

RÉSUMÉ

Burnett survole l'histoire de l'Hindouisme et propose une approche chrétienne. L'ouvrage est une bonne introduction à la tradition religieuse hindoue mais l'approche chrétienne qu'il propose demeure inadéquate.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Burnett bietet einen geschichtlichen Überblick über den Hinduismus und gleichzeitig auch eine christliche Perspektive dazu. Während der Teil über den Hinduismus gelungen ist, bleibt der Autor eine adequate christliche Perspektive schuldig.

It takes a brave man to attempt a description of the spirit of Hinduism. Yet, as Burnett shows in his introductory chapter, Hindu ideas and practices have become such a part of the New Age movement in the West that some knowledge of this ancient religious tradition is now essential for any Christian apologist.

Having more than justified his enterprise, the author chooses to begin his journey by going back to the second millennium B.C. to the pre-Aryan culture of the Indus valley. The journey then continues through the Vedic and Upanishadic periods. Having dealt with the key ideas of 'Karma and Reincarnation' and the ideal way of life of classical Hinduism, he devotes two chapters to popular Hinduism dealing with 'Gods, Ghosts and Spirits' and 'Astrology'. This is followed by four chapters on the devotional tradition including a chapter each on the Bhagavad-gita, Krishna, Silva and 'The Divine Feminine'. He then deals with Yoga and Tantrism before returning to a more historical mould with a chapter on 'Reform and Renewal' since the eighteenth century. The volume then concludes with chapters on Guruism, 'God Incarnate' and a concluding chapter on the Western reaction to India and on Sadhu Sundar Singh as a model of Indian Christianity. A useful Glossary, a bibliography and an Index compete the volume.

The volume is a very good and reliable introduction for someone who is not familiar with the Hindu religious tradition. There are points at which it is particularly good as, for example, in the section on class and caste (p. 91ff). It does, however, have its weaknesses.

1. Its historical approach. Because 'Hinduism' is such a complex phenomenon the historical approach has been favoured as a way into it. In this way one is able to look at some of the many aspects of this tradition in isolation as they appear historically. The danger is that we are introduced to what the Indian religious tradition could have been in the past rather than to what it is in the present. From my limited knowledge of India, Burnett is not guilty of this too often but the sense of immediacy which comes with a study of contempary Hinduism rather than with its history is lost.

2. Its explanations. Burnett is particularly fond of Jung's explanation of various aspects of the Hindu tradition. This is understandable because of Jung's influence in the New Age movement. But Jung needs to be handled much more critically than he is in this volume.

3. A more serious criticism is its failure to fulfil the claim of its sub-title to be 'A Christian perspective on Hindu thought'. It was a mistake to emphasise Hindu thought in the first place because the Hindu tradition lays heavy emphasis