

providence, evil, and suffering. In the footnotes and index, readers will find an adequate bibliography for further study of the various subjects introduced in the book. The theological tone of the book also seems solid from an evangelical Christian perspective. The book also could be used to encourage and help people who are struggling with questions about the goodness of God in relationship to pain, suffering, and evil.

One distinctive of McWilliams's book is a rejection of what he calls "monergism," the theological view that "God is the only true cause of events" (p. 21). He admits that God's relationship to world events, such as natural disasters, is "complicated" and "controversial" (p. 20). He rejects a strong Calvinistic view for a more moderate view that he terms "divine self-limitation" (p. 23). At the same time, he believes God is infinite, sovereign, and omnipotent. He affirms God can use natural disasters for his purpose but that he "created a world with some contingency in it," and that God "does not micromanage all events, even though He is aware of and concerned about all events" (pp. 24–26).

Overall, this book is a good introduction to the questions about God and suffering. It is an easy read and is not intended to be exhaustive or comprehensive in scope. C. S. Lewis is frequently quoted throughout the book as a primary source along with a broad spectrum of scholars. One weakness is the lack of biblical support for the idea of God's "self-limitation." The author has a definite lean away from a classical reformed position.

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The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture. By N. T. Wright. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005, 160 pp., \$19.95.

I appreciate Bishop N. T. Wright's willingness to address the church through writing popular books. Wright is the consummate scholar and is perfectly capable of the kind of writing that would only be accessible to specialists in the field of NT studies. Yet over the years he has included among his prolific output books addressed to interested lay people. His recent short work, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture*, is one such book.

The main thrust of Wright's argument in *The Last Word* is that Christians must understand the "authority of Scripture" as a shorthand for "the authority of God exercised through scripture" (p. 25). In chapter 1, Wright says that the book aims to answer three important questions: (1) In what sense is the Bible authoritative? (2) How can the Bible be appropriately understood and interpreted? and (3) How can the Bible's authority be brought to bear on the church and the world? (p. 19). In chapters 2–6, Wright takes a look at the critical moments in the history of Israel and the Church and notes how the authority of Scripture was appropriated in each respective era. Chapter 7 deals with right- and left-wing misreadings of Scripture, and chapter 8 concludes with Wright's constructive proposal: "'the authority of scripture,' when unpacked, offers a picture of God's sovereign and saving plan for the entire cosmos, dramatically inaugurated by Jesus himself, and now to be implemented through the Spirit-led life of the church *precisely as the scripture-reading community*" (p. 114).

There is much to commend in this short work. I appreciate Wright's defense of the biblical canon against recent assaults by the likes of Bart Ehrman and Elaine Pagels. I also appreciate Wright's insistence upon an author-centered hermeneutic. He says that Scripture must be interpreted in its literal sense in order for its authority to be realized

in the life of the church. By literal sense, Wright means what the Reformers meant, “the sense that the first writers intended” (p. 73; cf. 135); thus, the work of grammatical-historical exegesis is of utmost importance. This approach to the Bible leads us, Wright suggests, to stop treating the Bible like a repository of timeless truths. Instead, we should come to Scripture as a story of the divine drama of redemption that has reached its climax in Jesus Christ. In all of this, Wright’s critical realist approach offers a healthy corrective to the excesses of postmodern skepticism.

Yet for all the good contained in this little book, there are some weaknesses. In *The Last Word*, Wright does indeed get beyond the Bible wars. As a matter of fact, he “gets beyond” them by avoiding them. I think this observation is true at least with respect to the issue of inerrancy, which has been the watershed issue of the Bible wars in North America for the past several decades. Notwithstanding a few possible oblique and critical references to those who hold to inerrancy, Wright does not render an opinion on the issue. This lacuna is a shortcoming indeed given the fact that many evangelicals have been arguing for years that the Bible’s authority depends on whether or not it errs in what it asserts. (See the “Short Statement” in the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* [1978], article 5: “The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible’s own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.”) Yes, Wright gets beyond that battle, but only because he does not show up for the fight.

Perhaps his reticence to engage this issue explains why Wright never quite gets around to explaining clearly what he thinks about the status of Scripture as the Word of God. In his critique of fundamentalism, Wright seems to imply that he does not appreciate the quirky inerrantists and their hermeneutical approaches. But he never sets out clearly (or at least in full) what his view is on the matter. Indeed, a number of his statements leave one wondering if “the authority of God exercised through scripture” reflects a Barthian perspective or something else altogether.

For instance, consider his remarks on the inspiration of Scripture. Wright defines this as “a shorthand way of talking about the belief that by his Spirit God guided the very different writers and editors, so that the books they produced were the books God intended his people to have” (p. 37). Yet on the very next page Wright says that even OT Israel did not identify God’s “word” with “the written scriptures” (p. 38). He continues: “We cannot reduce ‘thus says YHWH’ to ‘thus says Jeremiah’. . . . We have for too long been in thrall to philosophers like Feuerbach, who wanted to reduce all talk of God to talk of humans and their experiences” (p. 39). Reading statements like these makes one wonder if Wright thinks Feuerbach is somehow responsible for what we find in Psalm 119, where the psalmist clearly treats the human words of Scripture as God’s very words. Indeed, this is but one of many texts that we read in both the OT and NT that speak of the words of Scripture as if they were God’s own words (e.g. Nehemiah 8; Matt 19:4–5; Acts 4:25; 28:25; Rom 3:2; 1 Cor 6:16; 2 Cor 6:16; 2 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:5–13; 8:5, 8; 2 Pet 1:20–21; 3:16). Wright does not do justice to how the writers of Scripture talked about other Scripture.

Given the fact that he is unclear about the status of Scripture as God’s word, it is not surprising that when Wright finally does get around to commenting on 2 Tim 3:16–17, he says that this text “was written, not so much to give people the right belief about scripture, as to encourage them to study it for themselves” (p. 133). In other words, Wright downplays the importance of believing the “scripture” (*graphē*) to be “God-breathed.” Yet, it could be argued that in this passage, Paul makes having a right belief about Scripture (namely, that it is “God-breathed”) the ground of its usefulness to the Christian. At the very least, the two are closely connected.

Another shortcoming is not so much a weakness as it is a detour. I notice that Wright returns to a theme time and again that does not properly have to do with the authority of Scripture *per se*. It is his thesis that the Bible (not least Paul's writings) offers a critique of pagan empire (e.g. pp. 13, 47, 89, 99, 100, 112, 115, 131). The clear implication is that the Bible has a particular rebuke for what Wright calls America's "de facto world empire." Wright thinks that the Enlightenment project has bequeathed to the world a series of failed attempts to solve the world's problems and that America and its current "empire" is just the latest expression of that failure. As Wright explains: "The Enlightenment failed to deliver the goods. People not only didn't stop fighting one another, but the lands of the Enlightenment became themselves embroiled in internecine conflict, while 'rational' solutions to perceived problems included such Enlightenment triumphs as the Gulag and the Holocaust. The greatest of the Enlightenment-based nations, the United States of America, has been left running a de facto empire which gets richer by the minute as much of the world remains poor and gets poorer" (p. 13). He goes on to claim that America, "the great world empire of our own day, proceeds to impose its economic, political, military and cultural will on the world" (p. 100). It is true that this kind of counter-imperial (and thus anti-American) interpretation of the NT is all the rage in certain sectors of NT scholarship. (Wright, along with Richard Horsley, John Dominic Crossan, Jonathan Reed, and others, is considered to be one of the chief proponents of counter-imperial readings of the NT, as is evidenced by his many writings and his participation in Richard Horsley's "Paul and Politics Group" of the Society of Biblical Literature. For more on this movement, see Richard Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* [Fortress, 2003]; Richard Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* [Trinity, 1997]; Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl* [Trinity, 2000]; John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus' Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom* [HarperSanFrancisco, 2004].) But the implications of this thesis are far from settled and do not in any case help to advance Wright's argument in this book.

Interestingly, Wright indicates that this imperial, Enlightenment outlook is characteristic of American fundamentalism. Perhaps it is for this reason that Wright rarely misses a chance to engage in his own brand of polemics against conservative North-American evangelicals who, he claims, "choose to ignore" the Bible's authoritative teaching on loving one's enemies, economic justice, and on opposing the death penalty (pp. 92–93). Disparaging American foreign policy and conservative evangelicals in America might give Wright credibility with liberal academics, but I suspect it will only serve to alienate large portions of his audience while detracting from the larger case that he is making about the authority of Scripture. Or, it will appeal to the ranks of emergent church members who seemingly have latched on to Wright and his critique of traditional evangelical Christianity.

Nevertheless, Wright might have had more success with this line had his description of fundamentalists not been so given to overstatement. The majority of evangelicals in America do hold to the inerrancy position, but they do not all fit into the fundamentalist picture that Wright draws. The hermeneutical errors that he charges against fundamentalists are not shared by all inerrantists. I am not sure, therefore, that Wright understands theological conservatives in North America as well as he thinks he does. If his list of "Misreadings of the Right" is any indication (pp. 106–8), I would have to say that he has a better handle on caricature than he does on reality.

I generally enjoy N. T. Wright's work, and my reading of *The Last Word* was no exception. Yet I think he left a few too many things undone in this book. He does warn the reader at the outset that "the present book makes no pretense at completeness" (p. xii). But one wonders why he had more to say about counter-imperial readings of

the NT than he does about the question of inerrancy and how it relates to the authority of Scripture. If the authority of Scripture has anything to do with the Scripture's right to command belief and action, then surely Wright could have dwelt a little more on the status of Scripture as God's words. Unfortunately, it appears that Wright was a little too eager to get beyond the Bible wars to engage such questions. Readers, therefore, will likely be tempted to get *beyond* Wright's book if they want to find the answers.

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The God Who Believes: Faith, Doubt, and the Vicarious Humanity of Christ. By Christian D. Kettler. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2005, xiv + 194 pp., \$24.00 paper.

The God Who Believes is a theology of x worked out in light of y , where x is a specific doctrine and y is an influential approach serving as a point of departure. In this instance, x is faith and doubt and y is T. F. Torrance's work on the vicarious humanity of Christ. There are definite advantages to this kind of theology, like the ability to uncover fresh aspects of truth or to see old things from a new perspective. Torrance and Ray S. Anderson disciple Christian D. Kettler's book benefits from these effects. But there is also a possibility that the foundational reference may be overextended, and *The God Who Believes* does not escape this danger. For this and other reasons Kettler attains a decidedly mixed result.

The work's greatest asset is certainly the importance of its subject matter. The relationship between an individual's personal faith (or lack thereof) and Christ's perfect faith is a topic ripe for further elucidation in a variety of venues. And although one is left wishing that Kettler had been clearer and gone further in explaining the intricacies of this complex theological puzzle, he has at least contributed to the discussion. Another good point is in the basic animus of Kettler's position: Christ did not live his life and die his death for every human shortcoming save the sin of doubt. Faith can never be complete in this world, and Christians often fail to believe as thoroughly as they ought to. Kettler rightly reminds us of the good news that there are resources in Christ to address our doubts, and they ought to be appropriated. The question then becomes, in what manner and to what degree is our own belief related to Christ? Kettler signals his answer thus: "Can we say that *Jesus believes*, not just as an example of a believer, but *believes for me and in my place, vicariously*, so that I can be helped in my unbelief (Mark 9:24)?" (p. xii).

Kettler, following the Torrances and Anderson, underscores that Christ lived a fully human life, in all of its implications, on our behalf. But Kettler suggests that Christ even *doubted* on our behalf: "Jesus the Son of God must walk the path of sinful humanity, sharing our stories, including our doubts and fears. . . . Must Jesus doubt with us as well?" (pp. 27–28). Kettler is a little tentative here, and leaves us wondering what precisely he means. He ostensibly removes this uncertainty later in the book by asking and answering: "Did Jesus, then, doubt? No, not in the sense that doubt is contrary to absolute faith in the Father and his purposes. Yes, he did, in the sense that he took upon our doubt, our fallen human nature, in order to heal and redeem it through solidarity with us" (pp. 51–52). But this statement merely adds to our confusion. If Kettler means only that Christ took on our doubt as one more category of failure to bear on our behalf, then why this previous language about "sharing . . . our doubts" and "doubt[ing] with us?" We do not say that Jesus "murdered with us" or "shared in our lies," because we know that this language says too much.