

JESUS

– a new vision

A series of Papers based on the work of leading scholars

The Papers are abbreviated versions of the original texts – easy to read

The Papers are authentic – using the authors' own words as far as possible

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The new vision

Between 1970 and the late 1990s, there was a spate of work undertaken by biblical scholars and theologians which produced a new profile of Jesus, the man, departing quite substantially from the traditional view. The message of Jesus' ministry, according to the revisionist scholars, is that he was announcing, right now, the coming of God's kingdom here on earth, but his vision of the kingdom based on love, compassion and non-violence was radically different from the expectations of his Jewish audience. It involved, amongst other subversive features, the overturning of the Temple power base of the ruling elite. Conflict was inevitable.

This is a Jesus with a cutting edge. As Rowan Williams puts it in *The Truce of God* (p.70):

Jesus is a man profoundly not at home with his world and his contemporaries, and so, in our terms, a singularly unpeaceful person.

The texts

The texts to be included in *Jesus – A New Vision* are:

The New Testament and the People of God – N T (Tom) Wright
SPCK. 1992

Jesus and the Victory of God – N T Wright
SPCK. 1996

Jesus – A New Vision - Marcus Borg
SPCK. 1987 (1st English edition 1993)

The Politics of Jesus - John Howard Yoder
William B Eerdmans. 1972. Second edition 1994

Naming the Powers - Walter Wink
Fortress Press. 1984

Unmasking the Powers - Walter Wink
Fortress Press. 1986

Engaging the Powers - Walter Wink
Fortress Press. 1992

The Method

“Theology” , when it means any books of an academic character about God and the Christian faith, does not have a good reputation in most church communities. It is held to be both difficult to understand and irrelevant to ‘ordinary’ Christians. Many reputable scholarly works may, indeed, be difficult for the lay person to understand, but the best of them more than justify their existence; they have constructive and illuminating things to say which have a bearing on the beliefs and outlook of ‘ordinary’ Christians and on the church communities to which they belong. Scholars whose work fails to have a bearing on the life of the church and on that of Christian people at pew level may indeed be dismissed as irrelevant.

All of our authors, here, are passionate communicators. None of them is particularly difficult for the lay person to follow. Their difficulty lies in their

attention to detail and consequent length. More often than not, their subject matter is inherently multi-faceted but, in addition, they must cover their subject matter with a thoroughness which will give them credibility with their academic peers; the expert who stands accused of having failed to deal with a significant aspect of his/her subject quickly loses credibility. The lay person, however, can usually grasp what the author is saying without following every detail of the enquiry.

My aim, in dealing with the present texts, is to produce an account which is around one-tenth of the length of the original. This is done by constantly asking 'what is the main point the author is making here?'. All else can be laid aside. However, as far as possible, I have 'made the case' using the author's own words so the reader can follow the author's train of thought. What you get, therefore, is genuine Wright (or whoever) – but not all of it. There are a very few interpretative comments, but in the main, I have let the text speak for itself.

The method is designed to address lay people who are interested in learning what the authors actually have to say. Would-be scholars looking for the complete picture must, of course, read the originals for themselves.

The Motive

Wright's two texts are strictly works of scholarship but in a later book *The Challenge of Jesus* (2000), he explains why scholarship of this kind is necessary, not just for fellow scholars but for Christian communities as a whole. There are some very curious views about the nature of God floating around in our present Western culture, he says, and the views of many Christians are not always much more in accordance with the scriptures than those of the secular majority.

What most people mean by 'god' in late-modern Western culture is the god of Enlightenment Deism. That far-off, detached being...is basically remote, inaccessible and certainly not involved with everyday life, let alone the day-to-day pain, of the world as it now is...Of course, many Christians...while speaking of God as utterly detached from the world (have) also spoken of the same God as intervening 'miraculously' within the world – saying, in effect, that though it shouldn't logically happen, God is greater than logic and so can, as it were, break his own rules. But this is not how the Bible speaks of God. And it is even more importantly, not the vision of God that we discover in Jesus.

He continues:

It is vital that in our generation we inquire once more: to what, or rather whom, does the word 'god' truly refer? And if, as Christians, we bring together Jesus and God in some kind of identity, what sort of answers does that provide to our question? (*The Challenge of Jesus* pp.70/71)

Wright's scholarly texts provide his considered and systematically developed answers to that question.. The compiler of the present Papers does not have similar 'apologetic' supplementary texts, like *The Challenge of Jesus*, from our other contributors, but we can be sure they share Wright's deep concerns

extending beyond the 'guild' of the scholars to the Christian community as a whole.

Publication

The abbreviated texts will appear in a series of eleven Papers on the parish website of the Church of St John & St Stephen in Reading. The first three Papers, devoted to the two texts by N T Wright will appear during the forthcoming twelve months: Paper 1 in September, Paper 2 in Spring 2012 and Paper 3 in Summer 2012. They can be found on:

www.stjohnandststephen.co.uk/theology

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