N.T. Wright, *History and Eschatology: Jesus and the Promise of Natural Theology*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019. (343 pp.) [ISBN: 9781481309622]

Jonathan R. Robinson

N. T. Wright is both a respected academic and an incredibly successful popular author. He is (in)famous as a proponent of the New Perspective on Paul and as a defender of the historicity of the resurrection. This book is based on his 2018 Gifford lectures, a series of lectures on "natural theology" endowed by Adam Lord Gifford which began in 1888, and which have hosted an incredible and diverse array of theologians, philosophers, and scientists over the years. Previous Gifford lectures turned classics books include William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* and Alfred North Whitehead's *Process and Reality*. Perhaps more pertinently, this is the first time a New Testament scholar has delivered a Gifford lecture since Rudolf Bultmann in 1954-55. Notably, Bultmann's lectures were titled *History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity*.

In many ways Wright's book is the reverse of Bultmann's. Whereas Bultmann demythologised early Christianity down to an existential "kerygma" devoid of any real connection to historical events, Wright seeks to work from the historical events that Bultmann considered "myth" to arrive at a view of God rooted in the cross and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. However, Wright's principal opponent is not Bultmann but no less than the Epicurean substructure of modernity. The book begins in chapter 1 (pp. 3-39) with an extended discussion of modernity and its Epicurean underpinnings. The philosophy of Epicurus, especially as developed by Lucretius, argued that the world was random and meaningless, death was the end of human existence, and so "all one could do was to make oneself as comfortable as possible" (p. 8). Along with this came an unbridgeable divide between our world and that of the gods who have no interest in us. For Wright the adoption of Epicurean materialism in modernity was not a logically necessary result of scientific discovery, but has been presented as if it were. Critically, modern Epicureanism differs from its ancient predecessor in terms of eschatology. Instead of the pursuit of pleasure (hence the confusing modern culinary usage of "Epicure"), modern Epicureans have developed a "myth of progress" which is "a kind of providence without God" (p. 27). As a consequence, we have developed the idea that you can be "on the right side of history", that "progress", whether technological or social, is both inevitable and something to be embraced, and that modern worldviews are inherently superior to ancient ones. For Wright "the resurgence of Epicureanism in the modern West has been the major contextualising factor, culturally as well as philosophically, within which the great questions have been posed and answers given" (p36). On the other hand, history, and particularly the canonical Gospels have been bracketed off from discussions of natural theology, or it has been assumed that history will disprove the truth claims of Christianity. For Wright this view is philosophically "muddled" and, of course, he intends to demonstrate how such historical work can contribute to a natural theology after all (pp.29-30). From the beginning, then, this is a book that deals with big ideas and grand sweeps of historical analysis.

In chapter 2 (pp. 41-69), Wright discusses how this Epicurean context affected New Testament study and historical constructions of Jesus. The protestant appeal to the original meaning of scripture as a way to

rejuvenate Christianity was "harnessed" by the rationalists to undermine Christianity by using history, within an epicurean framework, to show that the Gospels were mainly fictitious (p. 46). In particular, Wright argues here "that the idea of the literal and imminent 'end of the world' as a central belief of first-century Jews, including Jesus and his early followers, is a modern myth" (p. 47). This idea, of course, immediately undermines Christian faith because if Jesus and the early church were wrong about the end of the world, why should they be right about anything else? Wright surveys Strauss, Schweitzer, Conzelmann, Käsemann and Werner: a roll-call familiar to anyone interested in the historical-critical study of the Gospels. However, for Wright, our usual reviews of these figures totally misrepresent their aims and motivations. Wright argues these figures should not be considered to have progressed objective historical study of Jesus but were pushing their own theological and ideological agendas without any serious attempt at doing historical work. For example, Strauss was disinterested in historical facts and was presenting an idealist account of Christian faith (p.50). Likewise, Schweitzer did not "discover" that Jesus expected the imminent end of the world but brought that to the texts from his love of Wagner and Nietzsche (pp. 52-53). Meanwhile, Wright argues, British and American scholars misunderstood and misappropriated continental scholars and their philosophy, bending them to fit our historical positivist concerns (p. 67). Thus, real historical work, from which we might do natural theology, has been neglected.

The choice to do natural theology by bracketing out history, and the historical Jesus especially, is, for Wright, like playing a game of cricket on a baseball diamond or playing the violin without using a bow (p. 74). Wright does not want to play the natural theology game as it has been set up in the Gifford lectures; he wants to change the rules entirely. To do this he turns in chapter 3 (pp. 73-127) to the question of history and its neglected role in theology. This chapter is about twice as long as the other chapters in the book and at times is rather heavy going. At the same time, it reveals Wright at his most compelling: his discussion of the different uses and meanings of *history* (pp. 77-87) is lucid, enlightening, and thought provoking. Again, he argues that Epicureanism, idealism, and existentialism have often imposed themselves on our view of history. As antidote, he develops his approach of critical realism into an "epistemology of love" where one "simultaneously enters sympathetically into the life of the beloved while honouring and celebrating the vital differences between the two of them" (pp. 97-98). Wright however does not just target one side of the debate. His understanding of history requires that the Gospels are a public truth available to anyone (p. 105). History done within an epistemology of love should both defeat the arguments of sceptics and challenge believers (pp. 120-21). Within the rules of the epicurean game both sides have been getting it wrong. Not just materialist epicureans but "Dogma and piety alike need to submit . . . to the original meaning of scripture itself" (p.122). And uncovering this original meaning is the task of history.

The fourth chapter (pp. 129-152) focuses the discussion onto the terms *eschatology* and *apocalyptic*. This is with a view to critiquing the way these terms are used by authors such as Schweitzer, Bultmann and J. L. Martyn, but more critically to showing how first-century Jews and Jesus in particular understood the relationship between God and human history, heaven and earth, present and future. Again, Wright demonstrates his ability to clearly and helpfully present typologies of the various meanings and their resultant consequences given to the supposedly technical terms, eschatology and apocalyptic. As well as a

continuing critique of Bultmann's existentialist approach to early Christianity, Wright also takes time to critique J. L. Martyn whose Barthian reading of Galatians has been especially influential among many theologians. Wright's critique of Martyn is strident; he has both misread Paul and utilised only Barth's less mature thought (p.133). Positively, the key points Wright argues for are: that early Jewish and Christian writings are emphatically concerned with this world and apocalyptic language of cosmic upheaval is coded reference to political events; that the "now and not yet" approach to NT eschatology has been too easily dismissed by its critiques and is fundamentally accurate (p. 139); and the New Testament understands Jesus to embody the presence of God and to be the one who enacted the promised return of Israel's God to Zion (p. 144).

Chapter 5 (pp. 155-85) begins what Wright terms his "main argument". Here he outlines the first century Jewish worldview as Temple-cosmology, Sabbath-eschatology, and Image-anthropology. Heaven and earth are not separate because the temple forms a link between the two and draws them together. Present and future are not divided but the Sabbath brings the future of God's new creation into the present. And God is not disconnected from and unconcerned with humanity but having made humanity in God's image God works through us as God's vice-regents over creation. These biblical themes "were not so much rejected by the later church as simply not grasped" and the Epicurean worldview rendered modern scholarship unable to recover it (p. 183). Within such a Jewish world view the destruction of creation and the gulf between heaven and earth are incomprehensible. The biblical vision is not the abolition or leaving behind of the old world to go to heaven but that God's glory would fill the whole earth alongside humanity (p.172). This is Wright's big rhetorical move: Whereas the Enlightenment framing of natural theology has assumed that history undermines Christian faith by showing that Jesus wrongly anticipated the imminent end of the world; Wright employs history to show that Jesus' claims, when set in a historical biblical worldview 1) do not anticipate the destruction and end of the world and 2) reveal the assumptions of the Epicurean worldview and provide an alternative worldview with which to consider natural theology.

However, Wright is not arguing for the simple adoption of an ancient Jewish worldview. This worldview has been regenerated and redirected by the resurrection of Jesus (chapter 6, pp. 187-214). "The resurrection of Jesus is presented in the early Christian texts not as something in a series, not as a comprehensible part of a larger comprehensible whole, but as something which is what it is, means what it means, and is known as it is known, primarily within the new world which it launches" (p. 187). This is not a break with the old world but a new mode in which the world is recontextualised and reinterpreted (p. 190). The resurrection reaffirms the goodness and God-givenness of creation (p. 199). Because the resurrection is the reaffirmation and redemption of the creation "Love in creation and redemption closes the gap from God's side" and "love as the ultimate mode of human knowing reaches out in response" (p. 212). Much like Richard Hay's argument that the New Testament authors read scripture backwards in the light of Jesus' death and resurrection (p. 236), so Wright argues that the "commission to speak new-creational truth and to celebrate its foretastes in the original creation itself, will retrospectively illuminate every earlier glimpse of reality" (p. 213). Not least, this "new-creational perspective" looks back on the crucifixion of Jesus as the place where "God's creational and redemptive love might be known" (p. 214).

The final two chapters enter a very different mode. Earlier chapters (with the exception of chapter 1) were summaries of Wright's work in larger books elsewhere, albeit tailored to the current problem of natural theology. They were densely referenced, in critical conversation with philosophers and biblical scholars, and building on (without quite assuming) much of his earlier work. The remaining two chapters are far freer flowing and more constructive. In chapter 7 (pp. 217-49) Wright discusses "broken signposts" which are aspects of the natural world which, in the light of the resurrection, can be seen to point to "the truth of God and the truth of the world" (p.220). The seven signposts are "Justice, Beauty, Freedom, Truth and Power, Spirituality, and Relationships" (p. 224). When considered together these signposts point to our human "vocation", a concept which operates for Wright something like Kant's moral argument for the existence of God (pp. 220-221). What emerges in Wright's treatment of these ideas is a poignant *theologia crucis* where each of these vocational ideas appear to be frustrated and denied in the cross of Jesus, and yet in the light of the resurrection the cross becomes the fulfilment and paradigmatic interpretation of each (p. 225). Wright concludes that such a natural theology leads directly then to Christian mission, as "the signposts must come to life afresh" and "Those who discern the dawn must awaken the world" (p. 248). For me, this chapter was both the most engaging and stirring, but also the most frustratingly elliptic.

Finally, in chapter 8 (pp. 251-77) Wright ties together all his different threads. He uses the metaphor of a beautiful silver Eucharist chalice which might be seen by someone without knowledge of the Eucharist or Christianity but would still be evidently significant and meaningful even if the exact use and meaning was not discernible simply in itself. In the same way the natural world has this evident significance and beauty, but in itself cannot tell the whole or true story—it is a broken signpost. Only when viewed from the point of view of the resurrection does its full and true message become discernible (p. 261). Wright finds the traditional course of "natural theology" has missed the mark as philosophical assumptions have predetermined the "God" that nature might point us to. But in Wright's argument, "the reality in question turns out to be, not the God of 'perfect being', nor the prime mover, nor yet the ultimate architect, but the self-giving God we see revealed on the cross" (p. 274).

In *History and Eschatology* Wright demonstrates, again, that he is a scholar matched by few in his breadth and depth of learning and matched by even fewer in his ability to communicate winsomely and clearly. There were many high points in the book which have had to be omitted from this review. However, the overall book contained a flow of thought that was unwieldy and complex to the point of being convoluted. I wonder if perhaps too much was attempted in this book, even for a scholar like Wright, and a more focused study would have been more digestible and more convincing to its critics. In particular the most promising and intriguing aspects of his proposal, introduced only in the later chapters, received relatively little attention and development. Others have raised concerns about Wright's presentation of Epicureanism, his particular construction of an ancient Jewish worldview, and perhaps most tellingly his easy dismissal of centuries of Christian thought as "Platonic". Both the strength and weakness of a book like this is its dealing in such big ideas and grand sweeps. The devil is in the details, and many assertions would be open to critique at one level or another. What is so refreshing about Wright, in contrast to much in the field of biblical studies, is that he does not remain safely in the details arguing about minutia but works

to relate grand biblical themes and concepts to the prevailing philosophical and theological issues of our day.

The hardback book is well produced and free from typos. The only disappointment is the use of endnotes which, given how heavily referenced the book is, were a considerable frustration. *History and Eschatology* is essential reading for both biblical scholars and theologians. It is the sort of provocative and magisterial scholarship that has the potential to generate discussion for a long time to come—whether in agreement or opposition to its claims. This book is also a useful "catch-up" for those who have lost touch with Wright's output, as it condenses several of his more important books into chapter length treatments. My sense is that this book would be accessible to non-academics, if they are prepared for a dense and complex work. This is not one of Wright's highly readable popular theology books, but neither is it a fully technical work of biblical studies or theology. It will reward the reader with a great deal of food for thought and an enjoyable *tour de force* from one of our most prolific and innovative biblical scholars.

Michael Mawson and Philip G. Ziegler (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. (528 pp.) [ISBN: 9780198753179]

A. D. Clark-Howard

Academic interest surrounding the well-known and often misunderstood twentieth century German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer has expanded and diversified over the course of the last two decades. This maturing field, now into its third generation of scholarship since Bonhoeffer's own lifetime, has been met with an extended *Oxford Handbook* which brings together old and new voices in the Bonhoeffer world into one collection. The volume represents somewhat of an update from the previous similar type of project assembled as *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* which, while also being much shorter in length, was published in 1999. The new 32-chapter *Oxford Handbook* edited by Michael Mawson and Philip G. Ziegler marks an opportune capstone of the twenty years of Bonhoeffer studies since then.

The *Handbook* is broken into five sections; the first three treat Bonhoeffer's biography, doctrine, and ethical thought while the latter two examine thinking after Bonhoeffer and Bonhoeffer's legacy. Part I, "Life and Context," examines Bonhoeffer's biography in a rough chronology: chapter one deals with his time as a student, chapter two in North America, chapter three his academic career, chapter four the church struggle, chapter five the conspiracy, chapter six ecumenism, chapter seven the Jews, and chapter eight his preaching. Part II, "Theology and Doctrine," perhaps unusually, lays out Bonhoeffer's dogmatic thought in a traditionally systematic fashion: chapter nine deals with his engagement of Scripture, chapter ten theology proper, chapter eleven Christology, chapter twelve pneumatology, chapter thirteen creation, chapter fourteen anthropology, chapter fifteen sin and salvation, chapter sixteen ecclesiology, chapter seventeen spirituality, and chapter eighteen eschatology. Part III, "Ethical and Public Thought," explores Bonhoeffer's ethical thinking; chapter nineteen deals with reality in *Ethics*, chapter twenty formation, chapter twenty-one