

God and the Faithfulness of Paul

Edited by
CHRISTOPH HEILIG,
J. THOMAS HEWITT, and
MICHAEL F. BIRD

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God and the Faithfulness of Paul

A Critical Examination
of the Pauline Theology of N.T. Wright

edited by

Christoph Heilig, J. Thomas Hewitt,
and Michael F. Bird

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Part I
Prologue

Introduction¹

Michael F. Bird, Christoph Heilig, and J. Thomas Hewitt

N. T. Wright stands as one of the most prominent voices of the last quarter century not only in Pauline studies, but also in New Testament studies more generally.² There have been other book length interactions with Wright's works on Jesus and Paul.³ Wright has engaged topics as diverse as Second Temple Judaism, the "Third Quest" for the historical Jesus, the background and historical questions surrounding Jesus's resurrection, plus dozens of publications on Paul. Despite his academic breadth, and notwithstanding his ability to write for both scholarly and popular audiences, it would be fair to say that Wright is truly a Paulinist at heart. Early in his career, he published an article in which he was trying to adjudicate on the debate about Paul taking place between Krister Stendahl and Ernst Käsemann in the late 1970s.⁴ Soon after, his DPhil thesis was accepted at Oxford, and there he argued that Paul articulated a view of Jesus as the messianic representative of God's people in the Letter to the Romans.⁵ Wright cut his scholarly teeth in Pauline studies and, despite various pastoral duties and broad professional interests in adjacent areas, he has constantly returned to Pauline scholarship time and again.

Over the last four decades, Wright has produced an industrious amount of work on the Apostle Paul. We can note an early volume on Colossians and Philemon,⁶ a series of popular commentaries covering the entire Pauline cor-

¹ N.B. Throughout, abbreviations are according to the SBL Handbook of Style, 2nd ed. (2014).

² See John J. Hartman, "Nicholas Thomas Wright," in *Bible Interpreters of the 20th Century*, ed. Walter A. Elwell and J. D. Weaver (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 434–45.

³ Carey C. Newman, ed., *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright's Jesus and the Victory of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999); Nicholas Perrin and Richard B. Hays, eds., *Jesus, Paul, and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N. T. Wright* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011).

⁴ N. T. Wright, "The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith," *TynBul* 29 (1978): 61–88.

⁵ N. T. Wright, "The Messiah and the People of God: A Study in Pauline Theology with Particular Reference to the Argument of the Epistle to the Romans," (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1980).

⁶ N. T. Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon*, TNTC (Leicester: Tyndale, 1986).

pus,⁷ and an intermediate level Romans commentary.⁸ In addition, Wright has published two collections of essays on Paul,⁹ a popular level introduction to Paul (which sparked much controversy for such a little book),¹⁰ a volume length rejoinder to his conservative critics on justification,¹¹ plus a Pauline *Forschungsgeschichte*.¹² All this work, not counting reviews and lectureships, was largely prefatory for Wright's epic *magnum opus* on *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, the gargantuan fourth volume in his *Christian Origins and the Question of God* series.¹³ Paul is the epicenter for Wright's bold synthesis (or reconciliation?) of New Testament History and New Testament Theology.

Paul and the Faithfulness of God (henceforth, throughout the volume, *PFG*) is near-encyclopedic in the aspects of Paul's career and thought that Wright covers as well as critically engaging particular elements in Pauline scholarship. Wright covers the Jewish, Greek, and Roman background to Paul's thought. He traces Paul's developing mindset and his articulation of a particular worldview. Thereafter he identifies the salient features of Paul's theology understood as a re-working of the Jewish worldview. Finally, Wright locates Paul within the intellectual climate of the first century. Along the way, a plethora of texts are discussed and a multitude of scholarly melees are described. Some examples are the nature and expression of Paul's Jewishness, the relative height of his Christology, the *πίστις Χριστοῦ* debate, whether Paul was an apocalyptic or covenantal theologian, the influence of Stoic philosophy upon Paul, Paul as counter-imperial agent, and the meaning of "justification" in Paul's letters. Wright leaves very few stones unturned, he generously attempts to cast the net wide in his bibliography and brings historical, theological, and philosophical horizons together when necessary. John Barclay comments on the breadth and ambition of Wright's volume:

⁷ N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians* (London: SPCK, 2002); N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters* (London: SPCK, 2002); N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 2003); N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 2 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 2003); N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters* (London: SPCK, 2003); N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans*, 2 vols. (London: SPCK, 2004).

⁸ N. T. Wright, "The Letter to the Romans," *NIB* 10:393–770.

⁹ N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991); N. T. Wright, *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978–2013* (London: SPCK, 2013).

¹⁰ N. T. Wright, *What St Paul Really Said* (Oxford: Lion, 1997).

¹¹ N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (London: SPCK, 2009).

¹² N. T. Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters: Some Contemporary Debates* (London: SPCK, 2015).

¹³ N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* 4 (London: SPCK, 2013).

Wright here advances in full the synthetic vision of Paul's theology that he has developed and promoted over more than thirty years. The scale reflects his ambition: to integrate all the motifs in Pauline theology within a single large-scale schema; to elucidate its Jewish roots and its points of interaction with Graeco-Roman philosophy, religion and politics; to engage in most of the recent debates on Pauline theology; and to defend and advance his own distinctive theories on justification, covenant, and the Messiahship of Jesus, against critics who have lined up against him on several sides.¹⁴

The significance of *PFG* can be seen simply in the volume of responses it has received in the last couple of years. Several journals have given venue for significant article-length reviews, with one even dedicating an entire issue to the evaluation of *PFG*.¹⁵ Wright also has already produced a volume that distills *PFG* into a shorter length and continues his response to his many critics.¹⁶ Not since the publication of James Dunn's *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* in 1998 has a single book on Paul so dominated the scholarly landscape, at least in the Anglophone world.¹⁷

This strong reception demonstrates the need for a volume such as this one in a twofold manner. On the one hand, it is an expression of the interest in Wright's work and, hence, calls for further examination. In this context, it is especially noteworthy that there seems to be a gap between the English and German speaking world – a gap that we hope to bridge to a certain extent with this volume. On the other hand, it is not the aim of this book simply to offer even more reviews of *PFG*, since the format of book reviews and review articles is not only associated with benefits but goes also hand in hand with certain limitations. While they can identify certain issues that would deserve more discussion they cannot offer either that detailed analysis itself nor can they sufficiently deal with the emerging big picture. This volume aims at providing both: On the one hand, taken as a whole, the volume offers an evaluation of Wright's over-arching claim about Paul and his most substantive contribution to Pauline studies. That is, namely, 1) That Paul invented the genre of "theology" by re-working the Jewish worldview in light of the messiah and the Spirit; and 2) Paul's most lasting symbol of his theology and apostolic work was casting the church as a united body of Jews and Gentiles

¹⁴ John M. G. Barclay, review of *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, by N. T. Wright, *SJT* 68 (2015): 235.

¹⁵ See the cohort of review articles in *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 4.1 (2014). See also Barclay, review of *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (by Wright), 235–43; Chris Tilling, "Paul and the Faithfulness of God: A Review Essay," *Anvil* 31 (2015): 45–69; James D. G. Dunn, review of *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, by N. T. Wright, *JTS* 66 (2015): 408–14; and Larry W. Hurtado, "Review of N. T. Wright's Paul and the Faithfulness of God," *Theology* 117 (2014): 361–65.

¹⁶ N. T. Wright, *The Paul Debate: Critical Questions for Understanding the Apostle* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2015).

¹⁷ James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

worshipping the God of Israel.¹⁸ Wright's concern is to map the tectonic plates of Pauline thought, its origins, context, and significance. This goes to show that, in Markus Bockmuehl's words, "Where lesser mortals may acquiesce in losing the wood for the exegetical trees, N. T. Wright deals in intergalactic eco-systems."¹⁹ Or as Robert L. Webb once mentioned to me during my doctoral studies, "Wright paints with a thick brush on a broad canvass." Wright is a master at trying to describe the big story behind the story, something he opines has been insufficiently appreciated by his critics. On the other hand, with regard to the individual essays, the present volume allows for a thorough and robust engagement with Wright's near-exhaustive tome on the Apostle Paul by allowing authors to concentrate in detail on individual proposals made in *PFG*. Book reviews and even article reviews are limited in the amount of praise, criticism, and questions that they can pose. Hence the desire, or perhaps even the need, for an intentional and comprehensive engagement with Wright's *PFG*. We, the editors, have intended this volume as a substantial work proposed for tackling Wright's big picture and his finer details, identifying the place of *PFG* in contemporary scholarship, assessing its value, weighing its claims, and showcasing its implications. What is more, we have deliberately attempted to include perspectives from outside the Anglophone world and even beyond the realm of biblical studies, to provide the widest possible cast of contributors with a view to highlighting a cache of diverse perspectives on *PFG*.

As the subsequent essays make clear, this volume is neither a *Festschrift* nor a *refutation*, but something entirely different. It is perhaps best described as a *conversation* among those involved in biblical and theological scholarship as to the positive achievements, potential failings, matters requiring clarification, and future questions that Wright's *PFG* elicits for his scholarly peers. We hope this book proves to be a definitive moment in the reception of *PFG* and also a key moment in setting the agenda and questions for Pauline scholarship in the twenty-first century that Wright's volume has – for better or worse – bequeathed to us.

Part I, the *prologue* of the volume, includes Benjamin Schliesser's prefatory work which situates Wright's volume in the scholarly landscape of other

¹⁸ In Wright's own words: "My proposal is that Paul actually *invents* something we may call 'Christian theology', in this particular way (Jewish beliefs about God, reworked around Messiah and spirit), for this particular purpose (maintaining the new messianic people in good order)" (*PFG* xvi, italics original). Thus for Wright, Paul not only believed God had remained faithful to his covenant promises, but he also understood himself as remaining faithful to the God of Israel and the Jewish scriptures, even as he advocated a "radical mutation on the core beliefs of his Jewish word" (*PFG* xvi). This is a reciprocal dynamic of faithfulness we have attempted to capture with the title of the present volume.

¹⁹ Markus Bockmuehl, "Compleat History of the Resurrection: A Dialogue with N. T. Wright," *JSNT* 26 (2004): 489.

relatively recent Pauline theologies with his essay, “*Paul and the Faithfulness of God* among Pauline Theologies.” Schliesser plots the backdrop of recent Herculean efforts at producing a full-scale synthesis of Paul’s theology (e.g. James Dunn, Thomas Schreiner, Michael Wolter, and Udo Schnelle) with a view to showing how all Pauline theologies reflect the ideological frames and methodological premises of their creators. According to Schliesser, *PFG* is very much a negative reaction to the legacy of Rudolf Bultmann’s NT Theology and Wright’s primary contribution is his account of Paul’s “re-reading and re-telling of God’s single story in the light of the event of the Messiah” which he assesses to have “compelling intrinsic cogency” even if it is guilty of “narrative positivism.” Apart from a comparative interest, the essay is also concerned with bringing into conversation Anglophone and German-speaking scholarship on Paul, two discourses increasingly drifting apart from each other.

Part II looks at a wide variety of *methodological issues* ranging from hermeneutics to history.

Oda Wischmeyer tackles “N. T. Wright’s Biblical Hermeneutics: Considered from a German Exegetical Perspective” (translated by Wayne Coppins and Christoph Heilig), and she immediately notes the specific differences in the presentation of Pauline theology in the German and Anglo-Saxon spheres. Wischmeyer notes that Wright succeeds in creating a new paradigm: theology in the interplay of world, mindset, and theology, and in the context of the Roman Empire – an approach spurred on by his underlying pastoral-ecclesial interpretation of Paul, which is a model of biblical hermeneutics that works with the “continuous story” of God and the messiah and of the Bible as “story retold.” What is gained by Wright’s analysis of the big picture, however, is often lost at the point of individual Pauline texts, where such hermeneutic paradigms have limited capacity to illuminate.

Andreas Losch writes on “Wright’s Version of Critical Realism” and notes the origins and debates surrounding critical realism. Contrary to Wright’s own claim, Losch argues that Wright’s framework developed largely independent of Ben Meyer’s work on the subject. As a result, Wright’s approach differs in a significant aspect from Meyer’s paradigm. Losch regards Wright’s “hermeneutic of love” as a valid appropriation of critical realism as it carries forth the epistemological concerns of Richard Barbour and the Whiteheadian notion of interrelatedness, although Losch would prefer the title of “constructive realism” for those who wish to pursue this path further. In sum, while Losch questions some of Wright’s explicit statements concerning the location of his version of critical realism, he finds much that is worth further consideration, stating that it is “a pity” that Barbour never picked up Wright’s version of critical realism.

Theresa Heilig and Christoph Heilig assess *PFG* in terms of historical method in their piece on “Historical Methodology.” They confirm Wright’s

own claim that his approach can be labelled “abductive.” Indeed, Wright’s historical synthesis that aims at synthesizing the many “surprising facts” that emerge in Paul’s letters by offering a hypothesis that would explain them, seems to be a prime example of the approach imagined by C. S. Peirce himself. Still, they see some work to be done – both with regard to Wright and his critics – in more precisely analyzing the explanatory power for each claim on a case-by-case basis. Further, they argue that Wright’s “inference to the best explanation” is not limited to the realm of discovery but also extends to the question of the confirmation of hypotheses. Here, they argue that it would be useful for Wright’s methodology to be married to Bayesian confirmation theory. In that light, several of the unique Wrightian contributions as well as some of his inferential problems become clear.

Eve-Marie Becker embarks on a comparative study in “Wright’s Paul and the Paul of Acts: A Critique of Pauline Exegesis – Inspired by Lukan Studies,” which discusses Wright’s use or non-use of Acts. In general, she finds that Wright does not sufficiently integrate Luke’s testimony into his portrait of Paul beyond making occasional use of Acts as a historical source for Paul’s biography. Instead of referring to Luke’s portrayal of Paul, Wright restricts himself to the discussion of scholarly prejudices against Luke which largely ignore fresh insights into early Christian historiography that derive from historical studies and narratology. Becker finally points to two particular narratives about Paul – the Pauline concept of humility and Paul as miracle worker – in order to show how the Lukan portrayal of Paul in Acts could substantially question as much as enrich current heuristic rationales in Pauline studies.

Steve Moyise touches upon “Wright’s Understanding of Paul’s Use of Scripture” and he assesses what Wright makes of the debated issues concerning the use of the Hebrew and Greek Bibles in Paul’s Letters. In particular, Moyise notes and critiques Wright’s claim that a Deuteronomic conception of exile constituted the over-arching narrative of both Second Temple Judaism and even Paul. While Moyise appreciates certain facets of Wright’s account, he complains that Wright intrinsically favors allusions and echoes because their speculative nature makes it much easier to posit a connection with the metanarrative and that Wright’s emphasis on an overarching metanarrative also appears to lie behind his reluctance to link Paul’s exegesis with specific Jewish exegetical techniques.

Joel R. White discusses “N. T. Wright’s Narrative Approach” and he regards Wright’s approach to Paul as largely unique in that it assumes that Paul is tapping into a “grand story” that first century Jews believed they inhabited, one in which Israel’s exile continues. Wright’s Paul offers his own twist by reconfiguring this story around the messiah Jesus and constituting it as the narrative substructure of his entire theology. White regards this as an intriguing thesis which raises methodological questions and demands careful

analysis in order to determine the veracity of such an early Jewish metanarrative and Paul's appropriation of it for his theological vision.

Part III contains a series of studies on specific *contextual issues* related to Paul's philosophical, political, and religious environment.

James Hamilton Charlesworth latches onto the subject of "Wright's Paradigm of Early Jewish Thought: Avoidance of Anachronisms?" to assess Wright's account of Second Temple Jewish history. Charlesworth genuinely appreciates Wright's efforts to locate Paul within ancient Judaism and specifically commends him for avoiding supersessionism. However, Charlesworth makes several suggestions as to how Wright might have improved his presentation of Second Temple Judaism in relation to monotheism, election, eschatology, covenant, Jewish identity, and Jewish unities. Charlesworth hastens to add that Paul's genius should not be prosecuted at the expense of his continuity with ancient Judaism, which would unfortunately make Paul the "founder of Christianity."

Gregory E. Sterling evaluates Wright's account of Paul in relation to Hellenistic philosophy in his essay on "Wisdom or Foolishness?: The Role of Philosophy in the Thought of Paul." Sterling applauds Wright's inclusion of philosophy as specific topic for investigation in relation to Paul. In Sterling's judgment, Wright is at his best when thinking through how Paul responded to Hellenistic philosophy. He further suggests that while Wright's summary of ancient philosophy is accurate in what it covers – primarily Stoicism – yet it omits some important dimensions. He notes, in particular, that Hellenistic philosophy was much more concerned with the First Principle (or God) and with assimilation to God than Wright acknowledges. Sterling also argues that Middle Platonism, especially as it became a factor in the Jewish exegetical tradition, should have been addressed more fully but was unfortunately absent. Sterling is in basic agreement with Wright's comments on "logic" and "ethics." He seeks to supplement Wright's analysis of "physics" by pointing to prepositional metaphysics and the Platonic interpretation of the Image of God, both concerns that the Middle Platonic tradition contributed. The main critique is not so much of Wright's exegetical conclusions as it is with the background that led to those conclusions. By minimizing the role of philosophy in Paul's letters, Sterling thinks that Wright was closer to Paul rhetorically than he was to the letters in fact.

On the subject of "religion," James Constantine Hanges writes on "A World of Shrines and Groves': N. T. Wright and Paul among the Gods." According to Hanges, Wright offers a two-part proposition about Paul's religious world: first, that the apostle Paul can be understood and interpreted accurately only when he is described thickly in his cultic world, and second, that the key to such a "thick description" of that cultic world is the pervasive influence of Roman cultic forms, *religiones*. Hanges argues that the while the powerful public presence of the imperial cults is unquestionable, specific

evidence from Corinth and elsewhere shows that the influence of Roman cultic forms on the complex and multiform cultic world of the Greek-speaking eastern Mediterranean is not so easy to demonstrate. He suggests that what dominated Paul's thought was not a single constant such as Roman imperialism, but a shifting collage of contested socio-religious spaces. While the Roman Empire was undoubtedly the most potentially threatening of those powers, it is not clear that Paul, or many of his fellow imperial subjects, spent his days constantly and consciously obsessed with all things Roman.

Seyoon Kim assesses the counter-imperial portrait of Paul found in *PFG* with his study on "Paul and the Roman Empire." Kim remains singularly unpersuaded by Wright's depiction of Paul as possessing a counter-imperial message. Kim alleges that Wright does not meet his critics, who ask how, in the pertinent texts, Paul was trying to subvert the Roman Empire by presenting the salvation of the Lord Jesus in completely different terms from those of the Roman "gospel" – namely, in terms of redemption from God's wrath at the last judgment, the resurrection life, or conforming to Christ's image and obtaining God's glory. Kim also sees Rom 13:1–7 as a clear falsification of the type of counter-imperial perspective that Wright imputes to Paul. While Kim appreciates how Wright sees the messiahship of Jesus as central, he thinks that Wright neglects to explain how the messiah actually exercises God's kingship in order to destroy the real enemies of sin and death.

Part IV addresses a series of *exegetical issues*, covering an assortment of areas, and constituting the main body of the volume.

Gregory Tatum covers a crucial issue in his contribution on "Law and Covenant in *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*." He believes Wright seeks to provide a new foundation for forensic justification in terms of a grand covenantal narrative to replace its former foundation in terms of an odious and erroneous caricature of Judaism as a religion marked by legalistic practices. Yet, Wright's grand covenantal narrative is built on privileging Gal 3 and Rom 4 with their Abrahamic promises/heir schema rather than on Paul's use of new covenant language (i.e., participationist eschatology). What is more, Wright's reading of the curse of the Torah salvation-historically blames pre-messianic Israel for being pre-messianic Israel, and his reading of the Torah as divisive for the early church falsely presupposes that Paul abolished the observance of the Torah for Jewish Christians. In the end, Tatum concludes that Wright's presuppositions and approach significantly skew his reading of Paul's treatment of both Covenant and Torah.

Sigurd Grindheim tackles a topic close to the heart of *PFG* by engaging Wright on "Election and the Role of Israel." In a nutshell, Grindheim believes that Wright has put the cart before the horse in Paul's doctrine of election since election is about God's unconditional choice of Israel, and only secondarily about Israel's vocation. He concludes that in Paul, just as is attested in the Jewish scriptures, the vocational obligation is more frequently described

as cultic, as being a priestly kingdom, a nation that demonstrates what a relationship with God entails. They fulfill their purpose not by participating in the task of the messiah, but by worshiping him for having completed it.

James D. G. Dunn, a long time dialogue partner with Wright, provides a titillating essay on “An Insider’s Perspective on Wright’s Version of the New Perspective on Paul.” Dunn laments that the positive achievements of the New Perspective on Paul (a more nuanced account of law, covenant, and ancient Judaism) are spoilt by Wright’s claim that Sanders’ and Dunn’s contributions are diminished by their failure to see “end-of-exile” as the narrative backdrop to Second Temple Judaism. For Dunn, the way Wright constructs his arguments and takes swipes at critics suggests Wright is using Paul for a demonstration of Wright’s theology rather than reading after Paul’s own theology. In the end, Dunn judges that *PFG* is insufficiently aligned with the New Perspective by failing to prosecute many of the great insights that the New Perspective has brought to scholarship.

From New Perspective advocate to New Perspective critic, Peter Stuhlmacher offers his own assessment of *PFG* with his offering on “N. T. Wright’s Understanding of Justification and Redemption” (translated by Lars Kierpel). Stuhlmacher lauds elements of Wright’s approach, not least the central place of the story of Jesus’s death and resurrection in Paul’s theology. However, Stuhlmacher believes that Wright loads too much freight on the salvific nature of the Abraham story, adopting what is actually a late rabbinic view, which is not indicative of Paul’s own approach. This leads to categorical failure since Wright’s statements about justification are interwoven with exegetical hypotheses and speculations, which necessitate a critical renovation of his entire project.

Aquila H. I. Lee touches upon Wright’s account of Paul’s messianism in “Messianism and Messiah in Paul: Christ as Jesus?” Lee first sets the discussion of his chapter in the context of Wright’s own views on Jesus’s messiahship in Paul and the broader trends of scholarship on the issue. Following Novenson’s recent monograph, Lee believes that *Χριστός* in Paul is neither a name nor a title, but an honorific descriptor. Such an understanding of the term not only makes better sense of the frequency of its use and the retention of its messianic significance, but it also helps unlock the longstanding name-versus-title stalemate in a most compelling way. Lee believes that Wright’s placement of a discussion of Paul’s messiahship under “election” rather than “monotheism” may have some important christological consequences. He contends that placing Jesus’s messiahship under the umbrella of “election” puts too much emphasis on Jesus as Israel’s messiah, the representative of God’s people, and neglects the significance of Jesus with respect to God’s person. Lee suggests that Wright’s understanding of Jesus as messiah needs to take into account the fact that in Paul Jesus’s messianic sonship and his eternal sonship are ultimately merged.

J. Thomas Hewitt and Matthew V. Novenson pair together in order to discuss “Participationism and Messiah Christology in Paul” with a view to assessing Wright’s incorporative-messiahship scheme, which holds together Paul’s theology and his Jewish worldview throughout *PFG*. While they affirm Wright’s generally Schweitzeresque approach of explaining “participation” with reference to Paul’s understanding of messiahship, they demur, preferring a “ground-up approach” that highlights the significance of Paul’s messianic exegesis of scriptural source texts. They propose that Paul’s messiah christology is in part constructed from the specific Abrahamic promise of a coming “seed,” which provides a proverbial source for Paul’s “in Christ” language, and the relation of the “one like a son of man” and the people of God in Dan 7, which provides a conceptual background to “soldarity” in the messiah.

Larry W. Hurtado engages a distinctive feature of Wright’s Christology with “YHWH’s Return to Zion: A New Catalyst for Earliest High Christology?” Hurtado notes that the personal manifestation of YHWH forms a notable part of the expectations of an eschatological restoration/salvation of Israel in biblical texts and extra-biblical Jewish texts of the Second Temple period. In line with this, Wright has proposed, in *PFG* and earlier, that the claim that Jesus in his ministry, death, and resurrection is the embodied and personal return of YHWH was the crucial initial step in earliest christological development, serving as the clue and explanation for the “high Christology” reflected in the New Testament. There are, says Hurtado, several problems with his case. To begin with, analysis of Jewish texts shows that YHWH’s eschatological manifestation typically involved a divinely authorized agent, and so Wright’s sharp contrast between the eschatological manifestation of YHWH and the agent of YHWH is dubious. Moreover, analysis of several Pauline texts shows that the appropriation of the theme of YHWH’s return was with reference to Jesus’s future *parousia*, with scant evidence of the theme applied in the manner in which Wright claims it was. Further, the initial historical catalyst of christological claims was the conviction that God had raised Jesus from death, thereby vindicating him as messiah, and therewith had also exalted him to supreme lordship, now requiring Jesus to be revered accordingly. From this conviction developed the various christological claims reflected in the NT, including the appropriation of the theme of YHWH’s return. Viewed this way, several features of Wright’s account of Jesus in early christology prove to be problematic.

Returning again to the topic of God’s Spirit, a vital component of Wright’s account of Paul’s reworking of the Jewish worldview, is John R. (Jack) Levison’s contribution on “The Spirit in its Second Temple Context: An Exegetical Analysis of the Pneumatology of N. T. Wright.” Levison begins by identifying what Wright considers to be the three core elements of Second Temple Judaism, which feature in Pauline pneumatology, viz., the *Shekinah*, the tem-

ple, and the messiah. Levison then discusses the three principal Pauline innovations in pneumatology according to Wright: a Spirit-driven redefinition of election, the conviction that the Spirit enables believers to do what Torah could not – to fulfill the essence of the *Shema*, and a radical, high, and early pneumatology. Levison then surveys Wright's account of the impact of the Spirit on believers, principally, the ability of the Spirit to generate faith, the role of the Spirit in the resurrection, and the unique ability of the Spirit to transform believers. While Levison is largely affirmative of what Wright has to say in these materials, he does note some deficiencies. Levison avers that Wright's description of Pauline pneumatology would be suitably improved by taking into account Isa 63:7–14, Hag 2:4–9, and various excerpts from the Dead Sea Scrolls, which together show that Paul's pneumatology is not quite as radical as Wright alleges. Thus, Levison challenges Wright's claim that a Spirit-filled temple means the return of the *Shekinah*, and he more firmly places Paul's discussion of the Spirit in a Jewish matrix.

Torsten Jantsch probes into Wright's description of God, theology proper, with "God and His Faithfulness in Paul: Aspects of the History of Research in Light of the Letter to the Romans." Jantsch evaluates two premises of *PFG* against his own theocentric reading of Romans: first, Paul's gospel with its central subject of God, and second, the characteristic of divine faithfulness as expressed in God's promise to Abraham. Jantsch opens by surveying recent research on the place of God in Paul's letters which shows that Paul's discourse is thoroughly "theocentric." After that, he discusses several texts from Paul's Letter to the Romans in order to describe Paul's concept of God. Related to that, he then describes and evaluates Wright's interpretations of these texts. To that end, Jantsch summarizes thirteen "theocentric" premises exhibited in Romans. Jantsch detects much agreement between Wright and recent studies on God in Paul, but there are also points of contention. Not the least is Wright's double identification of Messiah Jesus with the people of God and with God himself.

PFG is typified by a robust critique of a particular school of "apocalyptic" interpretation of Paul, and Jörg Frey addresses this subject in "Demythologizing Apocalyptic?: On N. T. Wright's Paul, Apocalyptic Interpretation, and the Constraints of Construction." Frey analyzes the polemical rejection of the so-called "apocalyptic interpretation of Paul" and posits a neutralization of apocalyptic in Wright's view of Paul. Apocalyptic, appropriately understood and perceived in its wide variety, appears as the "Achilles heel" of the "great narrative" N. T. Wright fashions as the background of almost all Jews of Paul's time and the basis of Paul's thought. Describing four basic strategies of neutralizing apocalyptic in Wright's works (symbolic interpretation, reference to socio-political situations, integration into a "covenantal worldview," and integration into the context of an "inaugurated eschatology") Frey locates Wright's reading within a long history of distancing Jesus and the apostles

from apocalyptic (from Semler to Bultmann). While acknowledging the problems of the interpretations by Käsemann and his followers and confirming parts of Wright's criticism, Frey points to the more recent insights (from Qumran, the Enochic tradition and other texts) into the variety and complexity of apocalyptic thought, which are not adequately considered in the concepts of apocalyptic in the NT or Pauline debate. In Frey's view, Paul is definitely an apocalyptic theologian, but there is no alternative between apocalyptic and a reference to salvation history. On the other hand, Frey asks whether Wright's denial of any possibility of an "end of the world" in Pauline thought is rather a constraint of his construction, or even a result of an ideology, so that the gap between Wright's Paul and the real Paul should not be overlooked.

Richard H. Bell enters into dialogue with Wright on the subject of "Individual Eschatology." Bell chooses to focus on two particular aspects: first, justification by faith and its relation to the final judgement, and second, Paul's understanding of the post-mortem life. According to Bell, since the verdict given in justification is a "language event," which achieves an ontological change in the one who receives the gospel, final salvation is consequently assured. Judgment according to works for Christians is to be seen in light of this, whereby Christians receive their "reward" (e.g., 2 Cor 5:10). In Bell's view the judgment described in Rom 2:1–6, 29 is in a different category, speaking as it does of two possible outcomes; the pious Jews and Gentiles of Rom 2:14–15 simply do not exist, and the whole section 1:18–3:20 serves to establish that there will be no justification by works of the law. Although much of this discussion concerning justification is at odds with Wright, the conclusions on the second issue, post-mortem existence, are in many respects similar although the arguments are somewhat different. Bell argues for an ontological dualism of "body and soul," not a dualism of substances but rather an earthly/heavenly or phenomenal/noumenal dualism. The soul, which transcends both space and time, can account for participation in Christ, provides the element of continuity between the "physical body" and the "spiritual body" (1 Cor 15:44), and is humans' essential being which lies in the hands of God.

Volker Rabens writes on *PPG* and Pauline ethics with his discussion of "The Faithfulness of God and its Effects on Faithful Living: A Critical Analysis of Tom Wright's Faithfulness to Paul's Ethics." Since the ethical quality of faithfulness is such a central theme in *PPG*, Rabens raises the question whether Wright also attributes a central role to divine faithfulness in shaping and enabling human faithfulness (i.e., ethical life). To begin with, Rabens maintains that Wright's thinking on what is wrong with this world is not wrong, but that the emphasis is in the wrong place. Paul's personal focus is on the solution, not on the plight. And with regard to the plight, his emphasis is on human enslavement to the external powers of Sin, Flesh, etc., and less

so on internal incapacities. Next, Rabens argues that Wright's model of cognitive change through the "renewal of the mind" presents only one of several aspects of moral transformation in Paul, and that it puts too little trust in the empowering dynamics of Spirit-shaped intimate relationships. Thereafter, Rabens largely agrees with Wright's presentation of Paul's ethical aims and aspirations focusing on reconciliation, virtues, and fulfilment of the Torah, but he demurs on the question of practical morality as Wright's highflying study fails to be grounded. Rabens finally concludes that faithfulness plays a central role in Wright's soteriology but only a marginal role in his ethics. He draws attention to the transforming experience of love as the link between divine and human faithfulness that any exposition of Paul's theology-and-ethics that wants to be faithful to the apostle needs to appreciate.

In Part V, on *implications*, thought is given to the wider meanings and implications of *PFG* in relation to ideological currents in scholarship and its relevance for ecclesiastical communities.

Theologian Andrew McGowan offers his own thoughts on *PFG* with his piece on "Ecclesiology as Ethnology: The Church in N. T. Wright's *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*." McGowan identifies Wright's ecclesiology as a sort of "ethnology," given the importance of the "people of God" not only in the largest chapter of *PFG* but throughout the work. McGowan gives critical attention to three aspects of thinking about the church (or better, *ekklēsia*; see his note on transliteration of the term), viz., considering its identity, purpose, and character in turn. The first of these involves *ekklēsia* as a new version of Israel, and the difficult question of supersessionism. While concurring with the broad thrust of Wright's positioning of *ekklēsia* as Israel re-thought, McGowan is unconvinced by Wright's final verdict on historical Israel's future, and by his treatment of the hermeneutical questions related to supersessionism. Regarding "purpose" McGowan discusses the criticism made that Wright subsumes soteriology under ecclesiology; something like the reverse turns out to be just as plausible a reading. Finally, McGowan considers the way religion and sacrifice play a more significant role in *PFG* than in many readings of Paul, and suggests this emphasis on communal praxis is an underrated contribution Wright makes to understanding Paul's view of what becomes "Church."

James G. Crossley and Katie Edwards situate *PFG* in its intellectual environment with their piece on "*Paul and the Faithfulness of God* as Postmodern Scholarship." They see Wright's *PFG* as a source for understanding contemporary cultural trends in Pauline scholarship. In particular, they examine the ways in which Wright and *PFG* function in the context of postmodernity. While some consideration is given to the economic context of postmodernity, the primary focus is on *PFG* as a reaction to the fragmentation of identities over the past 40 years, evidenced in Wright's construction of a fixed, essentialist identity, especially the construction of "Jewishness." They investigate

some of the ideological functions of his understanding of ancient “Jewishness” in relation to Paul, including the ways in which Wright simultaneously stresses Paul’s “Jewishness” and Paul’s difference from what is deemed to be “Jewish” in early Judaism. Crossley and Edwards then describe how Wright appears to assume a timeless core at the heart of Judaism and Wright’s handling of twentieth-century Judaism in the context of European totalitarianism. Finally, they examine how Wright’s grand narrative potentially reinscribes a form of theocratic totalitarianism in his critique of postmodernity.

Frank D. Macchia looks at the issues of Spirit and church with his study on “The Spirit and God’s Return to Indwell a People: A Systematic Theologian’s Response to N. T. Wright’s Reading of Paul’s Pneumatology.” He is largely appreciative of Wright in helping readers to recognize the vital truths about the Spirit that are of relevance ecumenically to the witness of the churches today. When one reads about the return – God to the temple, the Spirit to earth, and the messiah from heaven, all of creation becomes involved. Such a reading of Paul opens up new vistas in spirituality and mission, it ties together various dimensions of the Spirit’s work, and challenges the church to appreciate the broader horizons of the kingdom of God in the world. Macchia believes that Wright’s vision of Paul correctly locates the church within God’s broader agenda to indwell all things, to inaugurate a new humanity, and to make all things new.

Next, theologian Sven Ensminger brings Wright into conversation with Karl Barth in “Barth, Wright, and Theology.” Ensminger examines Wright’s reading of Barth and, for that purpose, the chapter provides a comparison of the two thinkers under three major headings: first, the understanding of scripture in light of the doctrine of revelation, second, the topic of religion, and third, some reflections on the christological implications of Wright’s wider work. By way of conclusion, Ensminger also offers a reflection on the interaction between biblical studies and theology, and argues for Biblical Studies to be undertaken in committed dialogue with theology.

Edith M. Humphrey writes about the view of the sacraments exhibited in *PFG* by reflecting on “Bishop Wright: Sacramentality and the Role of the Sacraments.” Humphrey applauds Wright’s treatment of Paul and the sacraments in *PFG* for its care in situating the apostle’s thought and praxis within the first century and for its critique of interpreters who mute Paul’s proclamation of the covenant, his emphasis upon the corporate body of Christ, and the church’s prophetic role. She explores Wright’s treatment in terms of his overall approach (by which the church emerges as Paul’s load-bearing symbol), his theology (which clearly distinguishes creator from the creation), and his concentration upon historical continuity. She seeks, then, to demonstrate that in Wright’s scheme the sacraments speak more particularly to the identity of the people of God and to their counter-cultural position in the world, than to the character and action of God. She makes a plea that, due to Paul’s under-

standing of how God has redeemed the temporal-material world, the sacraments should also be seen as acting in a theophoric manner. That is, they provide the God-given locale for the church's communion with God, and themselves reveal God to those who are in Christ.

Eckhard J. Schnabel explores what Wright's book tells us about mission and evangelism in his essay entitled, "Evangelism and the Mission of the Church." Schnabel focuses first on Paul's missionary work, in particular his missionary preaching upon arrival in a new city, his geographical strategies, the founding of local congregations, and the missions of Paul and Peter. A second focus is the concept and reality of conversion, including interaction with Wright's refusal to use the term for Paul's Damascus experience. Third, a discussion of the explication of the gospel traces the importance of what Wright says about Jesus's messianic identity and the centrality of Jesus's death on the cross as the event in which God solved the problem of the world, of human beings, and of Israel, while emphasizing that one should not allow this triple "back story" to take center stage. Finally, a discussion of definitions of mission and evangelism takes issue with Wright's charge that both in the Middle Ages and after the Reformation, Christian missionaries only wanted to collect "souls" for a future heaven.

Fittingly, in Part VI, N. T. Wright is then given the chance to engage the praise, questions, and criticism of his interlocutors as an *epilogue* to this volume. On the whole, this book proves that Paul, the man and his letters, make for a great scholarly conversation and interest in the subject is not going to evaporate any time soon. In addition, N. T. Wright's *PFG* is by no means a conversation stopper but a great stimulus for studying Paul, his God, his messiah, and the mission of the church. We hope that such conversations, in the classroom, in churches, and at conference tables, will well continue into the foreseeable future.

Many people need to be thanked for the production of this volume. First, we wish to express our admiration to Wright for his massive tome, his work on Paul is a source of great inspiration and insight, and while no one can agree with all of it, we all concur that *PFG* is a landmark volume that deserves wide attention and concerted reflection in the guild of New Testament studies. Second, we are grateful to the contributors for taking the time to read *PFG* – a task which depletes at least two months from anyone's intellectual life – and committing themselves to writing quality reflections about it. Third, we wish to acknowledge the good folks at Mohr Siebeck, especially Henning Ziebritzki, as well as the series editor Jörg Frey, for their support and confidence in this project. Fourth, we want to thank Andrew W. Pitts for his assistance at the initial phase of this project. Fifth, we are grateful to Anthony Fisher for proofreading the manuscript and to the theological faculty of the University of Zurich for a grant that facilitated the production of this volume. Sixth, among the editorial team, Christoph Heilig was the *Baumeis-*

ter, or grand architect, who conceived the idea for this book and had the drive to bring it to realization. J. Thomas Hewitt was an industrious work-horse, providing an invaluable contribution to the nitty gritty details of making this book happen, despite the birth of another child in the family and even enduring an unexpected move of home. Michael Bird had the privilege and pleasure of acting as more of a consultant to his two junior colleagues and providing advice on the various complexities of dealing with several plates all moving at once. Finally, we all wish to thank our spouses – Naomi Bird, Theresa Heilig, and Andrea Hewitt – for their support and encouragement during the production of this volume.

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Paul and the Faithfulness of God among Pauline Theologies

Benjamin Schliesser

The life and work of N. T. Wright are associated with many superlatives,¹ as is his most recent scholarly publication, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*. Those who read and write on Wright's *magnum opus* do not spare sympathetic, respectful, and sometimes exuberant words on its size, scope, and scholarly significance. They acclaim the breadth of its author's learning, the depth of his thought, the accessibility of his prose, the lucidity of his argument, and also his pastoral wisdom, which elucidates the relevance of Paul for today and "for everyone." As with hardly any other book in biblical scholarship before, the "event" of its release arose great public interest: Prior to its publication bloggers made their bid to build up tension, and when the book was finally distributed, radio and TV stations conducted interviews, magazines printed articles, and academic institutions organized talks, panels, and conferences. Also, the present collection of essays is not the only volume exclusively dedicated to *PFG*.² It is tempting to quote some of his colleagues in order to illustrate the superlative impression made by his work in the field of Pauline studies. They describe the length, substance, readability, and significance of *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* in superlative terms, calling it "the largest single-author work on Paul in print, perhaps the largest ever pub-

¹ See, as a telling example, the first paragraph of the cover story "Surprised by N. T. Wright" in *Christianity Today*: "People who are asked to write about N. T. Wright may find they quickly run out of superlatives. He is the most prolific biblical scholar in a generation. Some say he is the most important apologist for the Christian faith since C. S. Lewis. He has written the most extensive series of popular commentaries on the New Testament since William Barclay. And, in case three careers sound like too few, he is also a church leader, having served as Bishop of Durham, England, before his current teaching post at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland" (Jason Byassee, "Surprised by N. T. Wright," *Christianity Today* 58.3 [2014]: 36).

² See the 2014 spring edition of the *Journal for the Study of Paul and his Letters* with reviews by Thomas Schreiner, Michael Gorman, David Starling, Martinus de Boer, Markus Bockmuehl, Beverly Roberts Gaventa, and Nijay Gupta, and with a response by N. T. Wright. See also, on Wright's earlier publications, Nicholas Perrin and Richard B. Hays, eds., *Jesus, Paul, and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N. T. Wright* (London: SPCK, 2011).