

Wright, N.T. *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996. 741 pp. Cloth, \$65.00; Paper, \$39.00.

This is volume 2 in the projected trilogy by Nicholas Thomas Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*. Wright, who taught New Testament for twenty years in Cambridge, Montreal, and Oxford, is now the dean of Litchfield Cathedral, and a name of growing importance in Jesus research. Whenever the sensationalist and arbitrary conclusions of the Jesus Seminar get public airing in our media, more methodologically responsible theologians and historians like Luke Timothy Johnson and N. T. Wright often provide an appropriate response.

In this vast but brilliantly argued and written tome, Wright reviews the past attempts in the "Quest for the Historical Jesus," in efforts from Reimarus and Wrede to Schweitzer and Bultmann, and he finds them wanting, and the results of the so-called "New Quest" equally so. Instead, he and others opt for the "Third Quest," which makes greater use of appropriate historical tools and sources rather than the much trumpeted (but faulty) current reliance on late apocryphal writings, or claims that the Gospels were written by stringing snippets of tradition together long after the events they report.

Wright sees much more history in the gospel traditions. He finds Jesus squarely within the world of late Judaism, a culture that bore faint resemblance to the milieu often posited by the Jesus Seminar. In these, Jesus often appears either as a social revolutionary or a caricature that might almost be labeled "Seinfeld the Savior," a peasant sage dropping subversive aphorisms along the dusty paths of Palestine. John Dominic Crossan, for example, presents the latter version in his *The Historical Jesus*. Wright spends a whole paragraph lavishly praising Crossan's literary charm, only to add: "It is all the more frustrating, therefore, to have to conclude that [Crossan's] book is almost entirely wrong" (44).

Quite apart from those who offer torque instead of truth, Wright understands Jesus as "an eschatological prophet/Messiah" who truly believed that he was sent to announce the kingdom of God in and through his own ministry, and then die in order to bring it about. Loyal to the prophetic role of Israel's prophets, he opposed what he deemed the corrupted institutions in the Judaism of his day, culminating in his Cleansing of the Temple—the episode on which more and more Jesus scholars are now focusing.

Whether or not God, in Wright's view, endorsed Jesus' mission by raising him from the dead will have to await his discussion in Volume 3. At the close of the present volume, however, Wright hints that He did in fact.

While conservative scholars will have much to applaud in this meticulous study, some may question its under-use of Johannine and Pauline sources, as well as its seemingly low Christology. According to Wright, "Jesus did not . . . 'know that he was God' in the same way that one knows one is male or female, hungry or thirsty" (653). Other passages also show a Jesus that would seem more congenial to Arius than Athanasius. On the other hand, Wright is dealing primarily with the *humanity* of Jesus of Nazareth in these pages, and, after all, it was Jesus himself whose human nature stated: "Of that day and hour, no man knows—not the Son, but the Father."

Others might cavil at Wright's strange habit of using a lower-case "g" for the God through most of the book. While his reasons for doing this are justified—a scholar striving for as much objectivity as possible—it remains jarring to the reader. The spelling of "gods" (plural) and "God" (singular) has always been a traditional convention to nearly everyone in biblical scholarship.

On balance, however, this is unquestionably a splendid, thought-provoking work. While it is regrettable that so much space had to be devoted to backing the reader out of the cul-de-sacs of revisionist New Testament scholarship, Wright can hardly be blamed for the wrongs of others. His refreshing return to the fonts of solid historical information, particularly the extrabiblical evidence supplied by Josephus and other sources, stands in pleasant contrast to the weird and radical misreadings that currently pass for scholarship.

We look forward to volume 3.

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Wright, Stuart A., ed. *Armageddon In Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict*. University of Chicago Press, 1995. xxvi + 394. \$15.95.

The success of American society is often credited to the lofty ideals upon which it was built. But far too often the reality of the American experience falls short of those ideals. Stuart A. Wright's book, *Armageddon In Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict*, attempts to point out one highly publicized example of American ideals falling short, the Branch Davidian standoff outside Waco, Texas, in 1993. Wright edits a compilation of fifteen essays written by scholars in sociology and religion who hold American ideals of religious freedom and equal protection under the law up to the reality of the events which occurred during the fifty-one-day standoff.

Armageddon in Waco is just one of many books about the Branch Davidian conflict that were published coincidentally with the Congressional hearings held in July of 1995 to examine the Branch Davidian conflict. These books range from reasoned scholarly accounts to conspiracy theories accusing the government of genocide. *Armageddon at Waco* seeks to steer clear of "conspiracy theories" while offering a "critical perspective" on events ranging from the initial purpose of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (BATF) raid, through the fifty-one-day siege on the Mt. Carmel compound with its massive media coverage, and concluding with the congressional hearings nearly two years later.

While intentionally avoiding the concept of conspiracy theories, this volume makes clear its two predominant themes. "First, that marginal religions and their members are accorded diminished human and social value . . . second, that minority religions are more likely to be victimized by extreme efforts of social control" (x). The book challenges American society to reexamine its antagonism toward new or marginal religious groups through an examination of the events leading up to the February 28, 1993 "assault" on the Branch Davidian compound known as Mt. Carmel, the fatal fire in which seventy-four members died, and Attorney General Janet Reno's subsequent justification of the assault.