BOOKS I HAVE READ: SURPRISED BY SCRIPTURE

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Category: Reviews

There are a couple of important things to note about Tom Wright'sÂ Surprised by Scripture: Engaging with contemporary issues. The first is that it is a book of essays and lectures, not a connected argument and the second is that the second half of the title (Engaging with contemporary issues) is probably more accurate than the first.

Not that this isn't a good book; at points it is very good. However, it wasn't quite what I was expecting. Overall, the book is disjointed and more than a little repetitive, but that isn't unreasonable with a book of essays. Also, with someone like Wright, a bit of repetition doesn't go amiss, because it takes two or three trips through the material to grasp the complexity of his thought.

To my mind, two essays, in particular, stand out. In 'Jesus is Coming, Plant a Tree', Wright revisits themes which are familiar to anyone who has read Surprised by Hope,Â his excellent book on eschatology. This quote more or less captures some of his central argument:

> *'When Christ shall come,' we sing in a favourite hymn, 'with shouts of acclamation, and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart.' What we aught to sing is, 'When Christ shall come with shouts of acclamation,Â and heal this world, what joy shall fill my heart.' In the New Testament the second Coming is not the point at which Jesus snatches people up, away from the earth to live for ever with him somewhere else, but the point at which he returns to reign not only in heaven but upon the earth. After all, the risen Jesus in Matthew 28 declares that 'all authority in heaven and on the earth has been given to me', and makes that the basis for the commission to his disciples.*

The second really excellent essay is '9/11, Tsunamis and the new Problem of Evil'. This is an excellent treatment of how the Triune God deals with systemic evil in the world. I quoted from it at length in an earlier post.

There are a number of essays around the theme of Science and Religion which will please some and infuriate others. One of the interesting points that he makes in these essays is the way in which British and American attitudes have been shaped very differently around these issues. I may come back to this in a later blog post.

There is an essay on the case for ordaining women which will no doubt please those who agree with his thesis while failing to convince those who disagree. For my part, I don't think he made a good case for ordaining anyone, which remains the fundamental flaw in the whole debate from my point of view.

In addition to the essays I've mentioned, there are a couple on a Christian view of politics which make interesting reading.

I suspect that if you enjoy reading theology and you like Tom Wright, you have already bought this

book or will get hold of it soon, but otherwise, you probably aren't interested.