

Likewise, in an all-too-brief discussion of the Spirit of God (pp. 217–21) it is clear that faith is not so much a cognitive response to the concrete experience of the Spirit which is identified as ‘the Spirit of the living Jesus’. Rather, reflection on the Spirit of God is simply an item of ‘further understanding’ (p. 285) which is also precipitated in the course of the emergence of faith. As such it claims a place in the (more verbal) post-Easter theological reflection that is ‘imposed on the events of Jesus’ life and death by his followers’ (p. 284).

This means that the outcome is a non-cognitive understanding of faith. The first Christians are said to have come to the conviction *that* Jesus was in some mysterious way ‘in heaven’, but this was not an outcome of a post-mortem encounter *with him*. What gives content to the experience of faith is not exactly an encounter with the Raised Jesus himself, but ‘encounters with Godself mediated though visionary “seeings” of the gloriously transformed, heavenly Jesus Christ’ (p. 284). It is thus primarily the revelatory activity of God that is pointed to when the first Christians affirmed that ‘God raised Jesus from the dead’. Clearly, it is no accident that Gant’s book bears the title of *Seeing Light* rather than *Seeing the Raised Christ*. The crucial question is whether this understanding of things is an adequate account of the origin of resurrection faith amongst the first Christian believers. Some of us would frankly want to mount a case for a more cognitive understanding of things. Even so, this is a significantly interesting and challenging book. It would be a mistake to underestimate its importance.

*Peter Carnley*  
Formerly Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia and  
Archbishop of Perth, Western Australia

N.T. Wright, *History and Eschatology, Jesus and the Promise of Natural Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), pp. xxi + 343. ISBN 978-1-4813-0962-2. doi:[10.1017/S1740355320000121](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355320000121)

If there were to be a prize for bravery in theology it should surely be awarded to N.T. Wright. This publication of his Gifford Lectures of 2018 shows him to have gone on an adventurous expedition, well out of the comfort zone in New Testament Studies in which we usually find him, and into the alien and fiercely challenging philosophical world of Natural Theology. Certainly, Wright appears to be entirely undaunted as he boldly engages with historical attempts to say something about God on the basis of a (general) revelation that is alleged to be available to all men and women everywhere, simply employing natural cognition and reasoned reflection.

Wright initially indicates that his purpose is to establish a channel of communication between the various departmental ‘silos’ into which the study of theology is usually organized. But he in fact does a lot more than this. After first arguing that Jesus was a part of nature, he contends that ‘the history of Jesus . . . is itself part of the study of the natural world’ (p. 271), which should therefore be included within the raw material of nature generally, which comprises the data upon which a

reflective Natural Theology is normally based. He then quickly moves on to throw down the gauntlet to anyone who would attempt to 'get to God', simply on the basis of the observation of the natural world, employing strategies of argument that are by definition independent of the consideration of a possible (special) revelation that might be discerned in the history of God's perceived dealings with Israel, not to mention what Christians judge to be uniquely specific to the words and works of Jesus. He is forthrightly critical of this whole enterprise; notwithstanding talk of 'general revelation', it is condemned as 'an epistemological version of Pelagianism' – a reliance on purely human effort (p. 255). By contrast, Wright argues that Jesus, especially through his Cross and Resurrection, not only fulfils the promise of Natural Theology, but makes up for its many shortcomings.

Alas, shortcomings are exposed thick and fast. Chief among them is the alleged historical tendency of Natural Theology to talk of God as though God were separate from the world, the Creator and the Creation being treated as two ontologically distinct entities. This is sheeted right back to the radical dichotomy originally drawn by Plato between eternal changeless Ideas and the ephemeral and passing world of time. A logically vicious platonic virus is said to have infected great swathes of Western thought, and to have led Christians to the mistaken belief that their ultimate destiny at death is to escape from this world in order to 'go to God' somewhere else (i.e., in heaven).

Likewise, historically it has been a fundamental fault of Natural Theology to rely on the argument from some kind of perceived design in the created order to glimpse the existence of a somewhat remote, behind-the-scenes Designer (p. 220). The rise of eighteenth-century Deism, particularly in the rationalistic wake of the European Enlightenment, and most notably since David Hume's critique of alleged miraculous interventions of a God from 'outside' the natural order, has meant that, ever since, it has tended to be assumed that God is somehow removed from the world. Even worse, the regularly presupposed dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural has unhelpfully resulted in producing a popular form of deism in our own day – such as may give a passing nod towards some kind of God, but then consigns this God to a place so remote from the world as to render God worthless. The result, at the end of this line of development, is the aggressive contemporary phenomenon of publicly expressed atheism (e.g., of Richard Dawkins). However, we should not be beguiled into mistaking all this for a 'modern' world view; it is actually a revival of ancient Epicureanism – the belief that gods exist somewhere but have nothing whatever to do with the world (e.g., pp. 7, 12, 105–106, 158, 254). There 'is nothing "modern" about Epicureanism' (p. 189).

It is perhaps a surprise that, as a corrective to this perceived problem of the separation of God from the world, Wright has no apparent interest in the Process Theology of the second half of the twentieth century (e.g., of Charles Hartshorne, John B. Cobb Jr, Schubert Ogden *et al.*, all inspired by the philosophy of A.N. Whitehead, and popularized by Norman Pittenger). After all, the Process Theologians very self-consciously conceived of God, not as absolute in all respects and ontologically independent of creation (as in the tradition of Classical Theism), but as absolute in God's eternal qualities of character (as all-knowing and all-loving), and in other respects, just the opposite, as Supremely Relative, given that God's knowing and loving is always relative to what there is at any given time to

know and love. Wright might have found this particular form of Natural Theology congenial to his purpose insofar as, in God's loving and knowing, this God is relative to and intimately involved within the created order, affected by it and everything that happens in it, being supremely responsive to all that is, and 'luring' the universe on to a better place through a constantly transformative process.

Curiously, while Wright shows no interest in Process Theology, he does in passing dismiss the possibility of '*pan-en-theism*', the term coined by Hartshorne to distinguish his neoclassical alternative to Classical Theism. This is because Wright believes that, rather than 'God in everything', '*pan-en-theism*' means that 'everything is in God' (p. 258) – the suggestion being that God is somehow transcendent, outside and in some way separate from Creation. Wright's charge is that '*pan-en-theism*' is nothing more than 'a cousin' of 'tired-old' *pantheism* (p. 266). Perhaps Hartshorne would be bemused to hear this. Indeed, he might well suggest that Wright's God who is 'in everything' – '*the-en-panism*' (p. 265) – rather than transcendentally separate from it, might be equally susceptible to being corralled as a 'cousin' of *pantheism*.

In any event, Wright's own answer to the apparently incurable Epicurean separation of God from the world, is not to draw upon a modern alternative Natural Theology, but rather to turn to another ancient cosmology – the cosmology of Second Temple Judaism – which, he believes, is equally worthy of our contemporary consideration. This uncompromisingly Jewish alternative to Epicurus, started with the image of the Temple as the place of the presence of God, and the locus of the revelation of God's glory, and employed it as a heuristic device for interpreting and understanding the relation of God and the universe generally. The Temple is thus a microcosm of God's presence in the entire universe, which in turn (ideally) reveals God's glory. There is thus no separation of God and the world in this divine 'filling of the whole earth' (p. 162). Moreover, lest this be conceived in purely static or spatial terms, Second Temple Judaism also took time and history seriously (quite unlike Plato). As the arena of God's revelatory activity, it furnishes us with an eschatological hope, this time employing the image of weekly 'Sabbath rest' as a promise of the peaceful rest of the 'age to come'. Thus, Wright points us to a new and refreshed creation that comes to birth within the matrix of the old, the kingdom of God that is already dawning in this world, having already been inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Jesus. The vocation of those made in the image of God is to carry forward the good purposes of God, not just as co-creators with God in the work of the propagation of the species (for that after all is shared with all the other animals), but as representative agents of God, revealing the glory of God's presence in the world in loving neighbourly care, justice and peace. This view of the renewal of creation by appeal to Temple-cosmology and Sabbath-eschatology, thus has social and political implications for the way in which human life is to be lived, and human destiny is to be found *within* the created order, eventually with materially resurrected bodies. Any (even broadly) platonic interest in an ultimate 'going to God' *from* this world, even with 'spiritual bodies' is anathema.

Wright's view of the resurrection is clearly pivotal in all this. Its occurrence as an event of the past is said to be appropriated through an 'epistemology of love'. This is explained as a way of knowing that allows its object the freedom to be itself (pp. 190, 197), without imposing one's own preconceived agenda on it, or exercising any kind of power over it (p. 99). This is said to apply to all kinds of knowing, such as the

knowing of people and things, even houses and trees (p. 188), and (very importantly) includes historical knowledge (p. 187). However, it also seems to include ‘a revelation of love itself’ (p. 190), for the ‘resurrection of Jesus declares that “God so loved the world”; and this declaration constitutes a summons to an answering love’ (p. 198). ‘It is love that believes the resurrection’ for ‘the shared knowledge of the Creator’s love’ is ‘grasped with answering love’ (p. 208). Admittedly, Wright’s presentation of this ‘loving kind of knowing’ is somewhat impressionistic, and this is probably the least satisfactory section of his argument, but it does signal a major advance in his thinking over the position he adopted in *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (2003), where Christ’s resurrection, as a historical event (that is in principle to be treated no differently from any other event of the historical past), is appropriated, not through a special kind of loving-knowing, but through a straightforward reliance on ordinary techniques of critical historical research.

Wright thus opens the way for what he believes is a new form of ‘Natural Theology’ involving belief in the transformation of the whole natural order by the presence of the glory of God. The reader may well wonder if, in fact, the attempt to build a bridge between the silo of Natural Theology and that of New Testament Studies, has in fact ended with New Testament Studies gobbling up and consuming what was formerly spoken of as ‘Natural Theology’ so as to effect its replacement. Despite the remit of Lord Gifford in establishing his lectureship, what Wright proposes does not really appear to be a form of Natural Theology at all, so much as a New Testament theology of the redemption and transformation of the natural world. ‘The fact that this is not how “natural theology” has usually been done does not trouble me,’ he says (p. 253). Alas, whether an exclusive reliance on the *biblical* language *about* the God who is present in the world (as King, Shepherd, Judge, Father, and so on) can be left to stand alone without the assistance of Natural Theology, and at the same time avoid the charge of an inevitable anthropomorphism, is a good question. These images of God may need the qualifying help of the keywords that flow from Classical Theism’s view of God’s ‘absolute ontological independence’ – ‘uncreated, non-finite (infinite), immaterial, invisible, unchanging, unaffected (impassible), a-temporal, eternal’, and even ‘omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent’, so as to indicate how God is *not* like the kings, shepherds, judges, and fathers of this world. Unfortunately, the three omnis are derisively dismissed by Wright on p. 241 as descriptors of ‘the celestial CEO of much Western imagination’ (though, significantly, with ‘omnipresent’ conveniently changed to ‘omnicompetent’ to accommodate Wright’s own God who ‘fills all things’). It may be noted in passing, that the charge of anthropomorphism can also be levelled at Hartshorne’s God, for while the knowing and loving of humans may be relative to part of the created world, God, as the ‘*Supremely* Relative’ is said to relate to *all* that is – leaving us with a blown-up version of ourselves. Perhaps Classical Theism may yet have its day.

In any event, Wright’s emphasis on the objective reality of the world and its future fulfilment, rather than its ultimate abandonment, flows from the insight that the divine purpose revealed in Christ’s death and resurrection is ‘not to destroy but to fulfil’ (p. 177). One implication of this is that private spirituality is put down as a withdrawal from the objectively real world and its history (pp. 194-95). Similarly, because Christianity did not begin with ‘new internal religious experiences’ (p. 196), Bultmann’s

programme of de-objectifying biblical language *about* God (demythologizing), so that it is heard as an existential Word of private address, is dismissed as ‘gnosticism’ (pp. 131, 264) for it also signals a withdrawal from the reality and objectivity of the material world. Indeed, if Bultmann’s programme of ‘demythologizing’ is understood as a way of de-objectifying language *about* God so that it is heard as a Word of address, Wright’s theological programme may be understood as the ‘de-platonizing’ of the language of the New Testament, so that it is heard precisely as objectifying language *about* the presence of the glory of God in the real world and its history. (This, even despite the *heavenly* orientation that early Christians found in Ps. 110, and the apparent platonism that is reflected in such passages as Heb. 8.5 [NB Wright’s treatment of this on p. 175], and Phil. 2, or 2 Cor. 5.)

Because the divine intention is ‘not to abolish the earth, or to snatch humans away from it’ (p. 175), it is important to Wright’s argument that we must avoid all apocalyptic talk of ‘the end of the world’. Indeed, given that the world’s destiny is not to be destroyed but to be fulfilled, talk of first-century apocalyptic belief in the ‘end of the world’ is therefore said to be an unwarranted misreading of Second Temple Judaism. Wright’s exposition of how Albert Schweitzer came to popularize this allegedly mistaken view in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, largely as a result of his visits to Beyreuth and his infatuation with Richard Wagner’s *Götterdämmerung* at the very same time he was interpreting the beliefs of Jesus and the first Christians, makes for very entertaining reading (Ch. 2). Of course, Wright’s readers will have to persuade themselves that Jesus himself did not envisage anything like ‘the end of the world’ when he is said to have spoken of the coming ‘end’ (*telos*) in Mk 13.7, or when he is said to have declared that ‘not one jot or tittle would pass from the law’ ‘until heaven and earth pass’ (away?) (Matt. 5.18). Nevertheless, Wright’s confident contention is that it was only the end of the world-as-people-knew-it that the Second Temple Jewish mentality had in mind. The destiny of the created order, including this ‘mortal coil’ is to enter upon a new age in which it will enjoy a linear form of material and physical immortality when God will be ‘all in all’ (p. 265).

What then are we to make of the twentieth-century apocalyptic narrative of possible nuclear catastrophe at the hands of some rogue world leader, when the world may certainly come to an end, ‘not with a bang but with a whimper?’ Likewise, the twenty-first century apocalyptic narrative of global warming has made us all doubly aware of the finitude and fragility of the whole created order. At some point the Sun will burn itself out; its energy will be spent. The solar system will cease to exist, as its remnants are hoovered up into a black hole. In the face of this, a mentality informed by Second Temple Jewish images of the glory of God in the Temple and the hope of Sabbath rest, may inspire us to act in hope to ensure that the world does not come to a *premature* end. But ultimate end there will be. Wright’s brave attempt (appealing to Rom. 8.18–30, 34) to persuade us (p. 138) that what has already been ‘truly inaugurated’ (p. 149) by Christ’s death and resurrection assures us that this ‘mortal coil’ will ultimately somehow be made ‘immortal, incorruptible’ (p. 267) is today certainly a big ask.

Meanwhile, those of us who accept the very real possibility of death within the next ten to twenty years, might find it more compelling to focus on the possibility of a future beyond death in the everlasting arms of the God of eternal love. Even if

Wright might urge us to dismiss this possibility of an ultimate ‘going to God’ as just another ‘footnote to Plato’, it may nevertheless be that, instead of contemplating an unending future for *this* world, we may find ourselves thinking with St Paul, that to be ‘with Christ’ . . . ‘may be so much better’ (Phil. 1.23).

Peter Carnley

Formerly Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia and Archbishop of Perth,  
Western Australia

Jonathan Holland, *The Destiny and Passion of Philip Nigel Warrington Strong* (Meridan Plains, QLD: Lakeside Publishing, 2019), pp. 537. ISBN 978-0244182366. RRP £20.81 or \$27.19.

doi:[10.1017/S1740355319000329](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355319000329)

This large, superb book thoroughly, compassionately and critically explores the life of this major religious figure in twentieth-century Papua New Guinean (PNG), Australian and British life. The book is of sufficient excellence to be of interest and stimulation in more than one field: biography, spirituality, history, history of mission and in Hugh Mackay-like studies in the demographics of change and continuity in Australian life.

The book divides into three parts, each well researched with informative and interesting footnotes. Part 1 (1899–1936) covers Strong’s life in England from birth to consecration as Bishop for British New Guinea, as it was then named. Strong was ordained a priest in 1923 after war service in France. He was an authentic Anglo Catholic. He was consecrated bishop in 1936 for British New Guinea; the region more correctly known by its Australian (since 1905) administrative term the Territory of Papua. Holland gives an informed and interesting account of the history of Western dominion across the island and islands (p. 131) and Australians generally and our elected leaders would do well to be more familiar with this. Reaching forward to 1962 for a moment, Bishop Strong would comment vigorously by radio broadcast within Australia about the newly independent Indonesia (1949) now led by Sukarno, and the claim for sovereignty over the former Dutch New Guinea or West Papua. Strong’s criticisms may be as pertinent today and were clearly prescient and well founded (p. 351). He made the *Sydney Morning Herald* headlines with them, earning a rebuke and apology from the yet to be knighted prime minister, Robert Menzies.

Part 2 covers his 26 years as a missionary bishop in Papua and includes the traumas of World War II and the Japanese conflict, and also of the catastrophic eruption of Mt Lamington in 1951, in its own way as disastrous and costly as the war; as impactful on the cause of his church. I note here four lines by James McAuley (foundation editor of the journal *Quadrant*), from his poem *New Guinea*, derived from time in New Guinea (1944–60) that overlaps with Strong’s: