

“There Are Some Things In Them Hard to Understand”:

Reading N.T. Wright

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I. Introduction

At the opening, I want to make a disclaimer. I am no expert on N.T. Wright. I hope that nothing I say today is seen as a final word: this is a labor of love, and is a talk that I had a wonderful time preparing. I hope that you will see some of that joy as you listen to what I have to say. I wish to thank Bishop Daniel Morse for this opportunity. I also hope you caught that my title is taken from II St Peter 3:16, where St Peter talks about the writings of St Paul and says “there are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.”

Dr N.T. Wright is like any of us in one regard: his education clearly influenced him. He bears many of the marks of having studied with brilliant scholars who are remembered for their lasting contributions to biblical studies. That is not to say that he is a parrot of their views, for nothing could be further from the case. He is an original thinker. N.T. Wright may have been a student of men who had immense reputations themselves, but he has made his own mark. He represents well what the Scriptures mean when they speak of “iron sharpening iron.” His is a first rate intellect, and he had the advantage of studying with men who were first rate intellects, at a first rate institution, Oxford University. The end result is a brilliant, first rate scholar, priest, and bishop whose contributions will long outlive him.

This little talk is just that : *a talk* on N.T. Wright. However, it has a purpose. What I specifically want you to do is look at the scholarship of N.T. Wright alongside the tradition in

which you serve. If you have read much N.T. Wright, especially his 2009 book *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision*, you know that he would have a problem with that approach, but I urge it anyway. Specifically, when I finish, I am going to ask you to examine Dr. Wright's ideas in light of the formularies of the Anglican Church.

We are going to engage our task by way of first speaking about his influences, then we will examine one of his books, very briefly, and then we will engage in some evaluation and thought as connected to our own tradition.

II. Biography

Nicholas Thomas, "N.T." or "Tom" Wright (born 1948) is an engaging, critically important thinker, retired Anglican bishop, and author of some of the most important books about the New Testament in our era. A native of Morpeth, Northumberland, which is in the northeast of England, Wright was educated at Oxford University, taking both his BA and MA there. He trained for the Anglican ministry at Wycliffe Hall, and much of his professional life has been lived out in ministry in either academic or cathedral settings. Except for a brief appointment at McGill University in Montreal, Wright has spent his career in the United Kingdom.

Wright obtained his Oxford D.Phil. degree in 1981, having studied with the Congregationalist G.B. Caird. Wright was also friends with a close colleague of Caird's, the Anglican clergyman/scholar C.F.D. Moule. I am somewhat familiar with the writings of these two men, and when you read their commentaries or other works, you can see how their teaching shaped N.T. Wright's views. G.B. Caird (1917-1984) wrote a number of important works. The two that I am most familiar with are his commentary on St Luke and his commentary on the

Revelation of St John the Divine. In his commentary on St Luke, Caird used the principles of historical context to explain the teachings of Jesus to great effect. At every turn, the ethical precepts that he reads in Luke's Gospel are set in careful context. Caird carefully developed the theme of Jesus as part of the overall Divine plan to rescue the outcast and noted that many times, St Luke was casting Jesus in terms reminiscent of Exodus.¹ A hallmark of Caird's style was to let Bible authors "speak for themselves."² These themes absolutely take off in the writings of Dr Wright on St Paul, and it is not hard to see the impressions made on him by Dr Caird in how a biblical text should be approached. Moreover, Caird's commentary on Revelation makes much of the concept of apocalyptic and stresses the way the Christian community was to proclaim its identity through its rejection of pagan morals. There are many themes in Caird's commentary that find resonance with Wright's later work on Paul. For instance, Caird wrote that John the Divine proclaimed in Revelation that the Christian life as a duty to imitate Jesus, hold fast to His testimony, and to be a Conqueror "repeating in his own life the archetypal victory of Christ...John never allows his readers to forget that earthly conduct matters and matters eternally."³ If you have read Wright on Paul, you know how similar this sounds.

After serving as the Dean of Leitchfield Cathedral, Dr Wright was elevated to the See of Durham in 2000. This is a very ancient diocese, and is considered among the highest ranking bishoprics in the Church of England. Historically, it ranks as equals with London and Winchester, with only York and Canterbury of greater seniority.⁴ Persons elevated to this see are members of the House of Lords.

¹ See Caird, *St Luke: The Pelican New Testament Commentaries Series* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), 34-39.

² Moule, C. F. D., review of G. B. Caird and L. D. Hurst, *New Testament Theology*, in *Journal of Theological Studies* 46 (1995), 245-250.

³ See Caird, *The Revelation of St John: Black's New Testament Commentary Series* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998 [orig published 1966]), 297.

⁴ E.A. Livingstone, *Oxford Concise dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 181.

Being the Bishop of Durham is a great honor within Christ's Church for other reasons, too. It is to carry on the work of many illustrious predecessors, such as J. B. Lightfoot, B.F. Westcott, H.C.G. Moule, and Michael Ramsey. These men made remarkable contributions to Christian scholarship and their works are still consulted today, both by Anglican Christians and others. Lightfoot was an immense scholar of Pauline literature and the Church Fathers. Prior to his elevation, he was a Cambridge professor. Lightfoot's commentaries on Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon should still be widely read. They set the standard for what Christian scholarship in the evangelical tradition could and should be. Westcott and his colleague F.J.A. Hort produced a critical edition of the Greek New Testament, and Westcott wrote important commentaries on the Johannine literature. Moule's scholarship bridged both the scholarly and the devotional world. Reading Moule is a tremendous help, and his work on the ministry in *To My Younger Brethren: Chapters on Ministerial Life and Work* should be required reading for young ordinands. His other books that can still be easily found today include *Thoughts for Sundays*, *Outlines of Christian Doctrine*, and his commentaries on Colossians, Romans, and Ephesians, each of which should be widely read. Michael Ramsey went on to the See of York from Durham, and eventually became Archbishop of Canterbury. Ramsey's writing is also helpful, but to me, is of a more mystical bent and more concentrated on the catholic tradition within Anglicanism than the others I have mentioned.

When you hold up the scholarly and literary output of N. T. Wright against any of those predecessors, he need not drop his head in shame. I do not think a more natural choice for Bishop of Durham could have been made when Wright was first appointed in 2003. If you listened to the Anglican rumor mill, you know that Wright and others were at one point seen as possible successors to Rowan Williams.

During Wright's commencement of Pauline studies, he became aware of the work of Krister Stendahl, Ernst Kasemann, E.P. Sanders, and James D.G. Dunn. If you are familiar with the works of these men, you need me to say little about them. I will just provide you with a sentence or two of introduction about them. As an educator, I am convinced that one's teachers and scholarly influences inevitably shape your own work as a scholar or teacher. You may spend your whole career reacting against what your teachers taught you, but more often than not, your own work reflects the influences of your teachers. That is natural. Here is a summary of the work of these four figures:

Krister Stendahl, which Wright mentions in the first chapter of *Paul: In Fresh Perspective*, was a Swedish Lutheran theologian, who served as both a professor of divinity at Harvard, a bishop in the Swedish Lutheran Church, and later Dean of Harvard University Divinity School that critiqued the interpretation of St Paul which many Reformation era teachers adopted.⁵ Stendahl argued that the "introspective self" that Martin Luther and so many others read in St Paul was a Western, modern phenomenon that is an anachronistic reading of St Paul. In his later career, Stendahl became an outspoken proponent for greater inclusiveness in church life where women's ordination and gay rights were concerned.

Ernst Kasemann (1906-1998) is acknowledged by Wright to be one of his "heroes."⁶ Kasemann did much work on St Paul and his theology of justification.⁷ He insisted on Paul's teaching that Jesus must be confessed as Lord, much in the same way that N.T. Wright argued.

Finally, E.P. Sanders and James Dunn also figure into the constellation of influences on Wright; both of them are more or less contemporaries of Wright and have worked in the same

⁵ Obituary in *Christian Century*, 5/20/2008, Vol. 125, No. 10: 18.

⁶ 51.

⁷ Zahl, Paul F.M. 1998. "A tribute to Ernst Kasemann and a theological testament." *Anglican Theological Review* Vol 80, no. 3: 382.

field as cobelligerents in the front lines of establishing the “new perspective on Paul.” While Wright critiques some of their conclusions, he notes their inestimable influence on Pauline studies repeatedly. In his book *Justification*, Wright says that Sanders’ writing on Paul ostensibly created the “New Perspective” (even though James Dunn is credited with the phrase itself—although Dunn says he heard Wright using it first) and no one can read and interpret Paul correctly today without taking Sanders’ views into consideration. Sanders is responsible in Wright’s view of creating a veritable “Copernican Revolution” in Pauline studies with his insistence that Paul be read in light of Second Temple Judaism, and that the Reformation era scholars who wrote about Paul’s views on justification simply had it wrong.⁸ It was Sanders who seems to have first posited that Paul believed that faith in Christ plus “covenant faithfulness to the Law” and predating Wright, argued that understanding Paul should be done independently of the Reformation heritage, and in first century terms. Dunn has sought to refine some of Sanders’ conclusions or redefine them in some instances.

After his retirement as Bishop of Durham in 2010, Dr Wright has become the Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at the University of St Andrews in Scotland. As many of you will undoubtedly know, Wright’s successor, the Most Reverend Justin Welby, has gone on to become the Archbishop of Canterbury.

If you want to read more in a very concise fashion about Wright, there is a nice biography of him in the April 2014 issue of *Christianity Today*, by Jason Byassee.

III. Examination of Paul: In Fresh Perspective

I chose to review and react to one smaller title of Wright with you for a number of reasons. First, this is one of his briefer works. The corpus of his writing is immense, and his

⁸ *Justification: God’s Plan, Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 113-114.

longer books would require a much lengthier exposition than this lecture can provide. So, I chose *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) to talk with you about. I expect many of you have read this book, or are at least aware of it. I feel sure many of you have read his longer books as well. I have used his commentary on Colossians and Philemon in the Tyndale Series to great profit. I like to read N.T. Wright.

In some ways, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* is a good “first book” to read because it is shorter than some of Wright’s other books. I suppose in some ways, because of its length, it might be sort of an introduction to Wright and the issues of the “New Perspective on Paul.” These chapters were given as lectures at Cambridge University and other places.

In first chapter, Wright is at his best, I believe. As he explains the “three worlds” of St Paul, you will find yourself transported back to the very times of Paul. Here, Wright’s work in contextualization is very important and noteworthy. It is the conclusions that Wright draws from this contextualization that have proven controversial, for he believes that it was precisely here that the Reformers went wrong. They did not give enough credence to what Second Temple Judaism was about in their evaluation and understanding of St Paul, and thus, they walked away with a skewed reading of Paul on justification, election, and certain other topics.

I suppose this will right away betray me as a critic of Wright, which I really don’t wish to do this early on, but it is worth asking. Is conversance with the Wisdom of Solomon and the other Second Temple Judaism sources truly necessary to understand St Paul? If so, what happens to our understanding of the *perspicuity* of Scripture?⁹ What layperson can take the time to become familiar with all the literature of Second Temple Judaism before he can fairly and with

⁹ Wright has experienced this criticism before, apparently, because he tackles it in a round about way in *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision*. He notes that if pastors are not content to leave people in error about the nonsense surrounding the “left behind” theology, then why would they be content to leave them with a wrong impression of Paul’s doctrine of justification.

understanding delve into Romans on his or her own, or at least, read it with understanding when they say the daily offices? (It took N. T. Wright over 600 pages to set out exactly what he means by *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* in his longer work, Volume 4 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God*.) I found myself a little anxious as the references to the Wisdom of Solomon and the Psalms of Solomon piled up, as though a close reading of *pseudepigrapha* was absolutely essential to understand St Paul. To devote enough time in this literature to become an expert on Pauline theology, if Wright is correct in his assumptions about Paul's views as a strict Pharisee, would take much time away from studying inspired Scripture.

Chapter 2 unfolds his view that Pauline theology is shaped, not by "Law and Gospel" (to use Reformation terms) but by "Creation and Covenant." For Wright, Psalm 19 and 74 are two of the most important Psalms in unlocking the thought of St Paul. He holds these Psalms up for examination before certain key passages of the Pauline literature, and notes how Paul used those texts to prove Jesus's renewal of creation and fulfilment of covenant. Wright's understanding of the grand sweep of Scripture is impressive. Immersion in the texts shows, and his writing fairly glitters with the sweat of exegetical exertion.

In chapter 3, Wright works on the theme of Messiahship, and explains how this key concept of Second Temple Judaism links together with the themes of creation and covenant. Here, strong hints of a *Christus Victor* view of the atonement appear.¹⁰ I think that it is here where his indebtedness to C.F.D. Moule also appears strongest. Moule simply could not accept the view of propitiatory atonement, and while N.T. Wright will speak of the sacrificial death of Jesus, he does not seem to want to do so in terms of a substitutionary death.¹¹ The *Christus Victor* theory of the atonement is not the dominant view of the Reformation, which I think can

¹⁰ *Paul: In Fresh Perspective*, 45.

¹¹ See C.F.D. Moule, *The Sacrifice of Christ* (Greenwich, CT: Seabury Press, 1957), 46. "In the New Testament...the idea of a propitiating of God on any showing never comes into view."

best be described as being most fully in support of the view of penal substitution.¹² Rather, the Christus Victor view referred to the *“eschatological drama of redemption including the work of Christ finished on the cross, namely the act of divine love thorough which God establishes reconciliation between Himself and the world. Christus Victor is used for the finished work that appears to faith as a victory over those demonic powers that have enslaved humanity and is the victorious breakthrough of the Divine will and the establishment of the “new covenant.”*¹³

When Dr Wright writes of the victory accomplished by Jesus Christ, and all its cosmic ramifications, it made me think of the Te Deum’s magnificent words. Wright really has some magnificent things to say about cosmic implications of the death of Jesus Christ that really are worth careful consideration.

Furthermore, and contrary to some of the more liberal scholarship, Wright firmly and insistently defends his view that Paul fully believed that Jesus was the Messiah. He develops his category of apocalyptic in this chapter, defining it on p. 50-51 vis a vis St Paul, and then explains how the death of the Messiah fits into that category. It is in this chapter that Wright argues that one of the most important ideas for St Paul is that “Jesus is Lord” and works out some of the implications this view has for the Second Coming of Jesus.

Moving along to chapter 4, he turns to historical analysis and establishment of a meta-narrative in the Pauline literature. He feels certain that St Paul viewed his life as a Jew in the Roman world with a clear awareness that God had worked out His plan within that world. This is one of the most compelling chapters in the book as he links St Paul’s writing with the stories of the Exodus, the Exile, and the Return.

¹²See Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman Holman, 1998). He noted that Calvin did pay attention to the Christus Victor theory, but not as his major point, 222.

¹³Erwin L. Lueker, editor. *Lutheran Cyclopedia*, “Christus Crucifixus; Christus Victor,” (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), 170.

In chapter 5, Wright begins to examine the overall meta-narrative of St Paul by examining how St Paul's creation, covenant and eschatologically-informed monotheism all fit together. The theme of election, Wright says, is developed as an essential attribute of Paul's monotheism, and 2nd Temple Judaism as well. What sets St Paul apart from 2nd Temple Judaism, though, is his understanding of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul set out to proclaim that it was the death and resurrection of the Messiah that was the crowning achievement of the One True God, and it is precisely this resurrection that was the "unexpected" climax of God's electing love. Of particular import for understanding this concept in St Paul is an understanding the Cross. The cross is the very means by which god's justice, the problem of evil's appearance in creation, and how God remains true to the promises of the covenant.

When we read chapter 6, we find wright explaining how he sees the concept of "election" functioning within the "New Perspective." He explains his view that God's people are justified by the Messiah's faithfulness to Torah. Confessing Jesus as Messiah and Lord is the evidence of election. This chapter explains, therefore, how first century people were to know who was in the family of God and who was not. Being in the family of God, as promised to Abraham, was not a matter of merely being an ethnic Jew, but rather, whether or not one confessed the Messiah. All who believe in the Gospel are therefore Abraham's seed: part of God's one family, elected in Jesus. For Wright, that is the real act of covenant renewal—Jesus has faithfully lived by Torah, and so all who confess Him are invited to partake of the covenant promises. If I have read Wright correctly, he believes justification is a status badge, then, more than anything. Justification is not a forensic declaration, but is instead membership in the community. Justification and election are kind of conflated into one thing in this chapter.

In Dr Wright's exegesis of St Paul, justification is not a judicial declaration, it is a *signification*. We are justified as we confess Jesus as Lord, and not Caesar, or the pagan gods. Justification and election are closely related: we know who we are and we know who the other believers are in the here and now by means of our being justified. It is our faith in Jesus as the Messiah that makes us Christians, and therefore, all who are justified are part of God's one family.

The earlier echoes of the Christus Victor theory of atonement also grow louder in chapter 7. Furthermore, Wright sets out his vision of the eschatology of Paul, and when you read chapter 7, you will find him critiquing, albeit briefly, the premillennial dispensational views, such as those of the "Left Behind" variety. Wright rightly notes that so much of premillennial dispensationalist teaching is fanciful and dualistic and not in harmony with St Paul's teaching, and he is on solid ground. His exposition of I Thessalonians 4, a favorite proof text for teaching "the Rapture," is convincing and although brief, deserves wide attention. However, that is not really new ground, or limited to the "new perspective" so much as it is a fruitful side point of his main discussion.

Paul's eschatology, informed by 2nd Temple Judaism, features a strong both/and aspect, which revolves around the coming of Jesus as Messiah and His being raised from the dead. We are already living in the New Age, Wright maintains. It is here that he explains the implications of justification as a badge of membership in the community: our behavior as contrasted with paganism is of great importance. Paul's understanding of the Spirit's help in following the ethics of the community is explored.

In the final chapter, chapter 8, Wright notes that Jesus and Paul are not in opposition to one another, as New Testament scholarship has sometimes maintained. Rather, Wright says, they

had different emphases. Paul is the conductor of Jesus's original composition, to use a musical metaphor (Wright is a skilled guitarist, by the way). The task of the Church is explained here. Our job (as it was in the 1st century) is to build unity among all peoples around the truth that Jesus is the Messiah, hence the Lord. Our behavior, as he has noted in other chapters, is important. If justification is primarily a matter of identification, a badge of membership in a community, then to be "un-pagan" is essential. He is getting at baptism here, too, and baptism clearly counts for much. What Wright is striving for is a view that baptism is the gateway to justification—but again, justification is not a forensic declaration, or a matter of imputed righteousness. Justification is a badge of identity, it is membership in the community, or one family of God through Abraham.

This ends the book review portion of the address.

IV. Evaluation

Wright writes right well. He is a prolific author, a tireless scholar, and an inspiring model of what it means to be a pastor-teacher, in terms of work ethic and contributions to the education of Christian people. I cannot imagine how he has managed to write so many scholarly books while teaching, and having the administrative responsibilities that go with being a Cathedral Dean and Diocesan Ordinary. Here is a man whose work ethic speaks for itself.

His work in Biblical studies is most impressive. University-level biblical exegesis is not an easy task to undertake: as I know all of you know from your seminary studies. It should encompass linguistics, grammar, theology, and historical awareness. It requires establishment of the text through textual criticism and use of appropriate apparatus. More recent work in literary studies that teach us how to look for meta-narrative and do discourse analysis can also profitably

be consulted. N.T. Wright knows how to do all these things, and I think his writing models this kind of careful, multi-disciplinary study.

I'm a historian by training; and Wright is himself an admirable historian, and teaches biblical scholars how to do good *historical* spadework and background research needed to get at the real provenance of biblical literature. And, he is able to do something fairly rare, really: he can write for both wide audience and specialists. His "The Bible For Everyone" series, a popular commentary designed for laypeople, includes volumes that cover the entire New Testament. That puts him into a great tradition of Anglican educator-theologians such as W.H. Griffith Thomas, J.I. Packer, and John Stott. Each of these, to a man, could contend in any scholarly arena, while also being popular with non-specialists.

He is a nuanced writer. You have to take care to sort out exactly what he is saying, and exactly what he is trying to accomplish in his writing. I think sometimes controversies have flared around him because of his nuanced approach. His disciples have sometimes taken some liberties with his positions or developed them to degrees that Wright did not himself intend. That sort of thing has happened with John Calvin, and I imagine many other teachers. Wright has produced such a large body of writings, he is someone who can attract a following, and he is someone who can attract critics, simply because there is such a body of writing with which to interact.

However (and there is a *needed* "however"), in *Paul: In Fresh Perspective*, I feel Wright does sometimes engage in what is known as "special pleading" and use of straw men when he constantly pounds away at the "Reformation" theologians that he believes did not properly contextualize Paul and set in motion centuries of misunderstanding. Polemical writing is not new, and much scholarship, inside and outside Christianity works off the basis of taking a thesis

and responding to critics of that thesis or demonstrating why one's thesis is to be preferred instead of someone else's thesis. But if you are going to engage in that kind of activity, you had better state your opponents' views thoroughly and fairly, and I am not sure that Wright does that in every possible instance. His shorter book, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* just does not always do justice to the Reformation views of justification except to say "I do not agree with those folks" and "they are wrong." As best as I can condense it, Wright says that Paul was not so concerned with the individual conscience as Reformation-era teachers presumed. Paul was much more concerned with covenantal concerns that were of import to the entire community of Christianity than individual salvation. This is probably where the influence of Krister Stendahl is most readily seen, for Stendahl often faulted modern interpreters of Paul on that point. However, I am not convinced on this point.

While Wright clearly has a fantastic grasp on the "movements" in Scripture's entirety, as I read the Psalms, and we know St Paul did that as well, I see many instances of an individual conscience seeking a relationship with the Lord. I do not think, therefore, that the idea of an individual stricken in conscience and seeking justification before a Holy God is merely a modern concept forced on St Paul by Martin Luther and others. Much of the Bible addresses this issue, and certainly the case is made that St Paul does so as well.

Martin Luther was a careful exegete. He was a "doctor of the Bible." While he may not have had access to the literature of Second Temple Judaism, he did have the text of the Scriptures, and it wasn't just Luther who read Paul this way. Had not the venerable Augustine read him this way, too?¹⁴ Should we really be prepared to say, as Wright seems to suggest, that

¹⁴ See David C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1995).

Luther could not rightly read St Paul without the help of the Dead Sea Scrolls? That is, after all, one of the conclusions that one can draw from the work of the “New Perspective on Paul.”¹⁵

Wright makes a telling statement when he says “exegesis needs the concordance, but cannot be ruled by it.”¹⁶ I don’t wish to quibble with him on that point: for, of course we need more tools than a concordance to do serious scholarly work on a text. However, *Biblical interpretation* is best done when allowing *the Bible* to interpret itself. I might put it this way: “exegesis needs the dead sea scrolls and the literature of Second Temple Judaism, but cannot be ruled by them.”

I ask you, “has Christianity lumbered along for 500 years under a delusion that could only be corrected with the discovery of *extra* biblical texts in a cave?” I have seen portions of the scrolls, and have read translated excerpts of them. They are lovely, but they don’t change my mind about the whether or not “the Reformation got it wrong.” Luther’s concern with the individual conscience was not just born out of his own experience, contrary to what Stendahl, Dunn, and Sanders, and to a lesser extent, even Wright have said about him.

Luther came to approach Paul only after doing serious work in the Psalms. Luther’s evangelical breakthrough was a “whole Bible” experience—he was well on his way noting the individual conscience’s struggle before God even before he did his famous work in Romans.¹⁷ I am unconvinced that Wright has conclusively proven that Luther and the other Reformers misread the Judaism that St Paul was correctly. We do not have to accept everything Luther said about other Christians or the Jewish people to say he knew how to read St. Paul. There are some

¹⁵ For a Lutheran response to Wright, see Donfried, Karl, *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*. Spring2007, Vol. 46, No. 1:31-40.

¹⁶ *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 26.

¹⁷ Luther’s lectures on Psalms were done in 1513, his lectures on Romans were in 1515 and his lectures on Galatians were in 1516-1517. His mature commentary on Galatians didn’t appear until 1535, after decades of scholarship and work in the New Testament, and after translation of the Bible into German. See Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Mentor, 1950), 45-51.

really strong critiques of Stendahl's reading of Luther and his approach to Paul that should be read by anyone who is ready to accept that Luther did not know how to read Paul properly, such as Stephen J. Chester's careful analysis of Luther and his exegesis in *Biblical Interpretation*, Volume 14, Issue 5.¹⁸ (Reading Chester's exegesis of Luther's exegesis of Paul really makes for interesting reading as you interact with Wright's exegesis of Paul.)

One other thing bewilders me about the book *Paul: In Fresh Perspective*. While the themes of "creation, covenant, Messiah, justification, election and apocalyptic or eschatology" receive extensive explication, one term receives only honorable mention. Sin. It isn't in the index at all. It is mentioned a time or two, but it functions sort of as a "natural calamity" for Wright rather than a condition of the human person. In no way does Wright deny sin. He affirms that Adam, and hence, Israel did not keep faith with God. Israel was not without blame in regard to Torah. And that fact is a matter of upmost seriousness, for the creation now groans under the weight of sin. But the way he describes fallen-ness is sort of like a tornado swept through the Garden of Eden and uprooted trees and spoilt the beauty of the place. And Jesus will come later and somehow put the trees back in the ground and make the grass greener again. Sin as a concept seems so important for St Paul that I really don't understand why it isn't treated just as much in this book as "creation and covenant."

Furthermore, Wright is not wrong to say Psalm 19 and 74 are important to St Paul, or to 2nd Temple Judaism. What of Psalm 32, Psalm 51, and Psalm 103? It seems to me that in all the centuries of our faith, Christianity has made more of those particular Psalms than Psalms 19 and 74, and yet they receive no special attention in this volume. The simple explanation is that they do not fit into the paradigm of "creation and covenant" as well, and deal more with how the

¹⁸ Chester, Stephen J. *Biblical Interpretation*, 2006, Vol. 14: No. 5, 508-536. Chester, professor of New Testament at the North Park University, Chicago, was educated at the University of Glasgow and is ordained in the Church of Scotland.

individual person is to be made right with God. They support “Luther’s reading of Paul”—which I think is correct, by the way, and the Reformation view of justification far better. That is perhaps why an Augustine, a Luther, or any number of other readers of Paul are more familiar with them than they are Psalm 19 and 74.

Dr Wright has much to say about the ethical dimensions of our faith. Rightly so, for the Christian faith is concerned with behavior because Jesus was. All the Bible is—but it is concerned with behavior in a particular way. However, anything that we say or do in the name of faith that puts the burden of acceptance with God back onto the shoulders of the human person automatically minimizes the work of Jesus on the cross, and it really weakens the possibility of assurance. Anything that stresses the works of our lives as being put in a scale of merit or demerit is going down the winding path of Semi-Pelagianism or Pelagianism. I am well aware that N.T. Wright completely disavows any sympathy for Pelagianism in his earlier book, *What St Paul Really Said* and the later book *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision*.¹⁹ However, in the much longer *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Wright says that Paul anticipated persecution and suffering ahead for the Christians, so he writes in part to fill them with the kind of zeal that he had as a strict, zealous Pharisee. St Paul does not wish to make strict Pharisees out of the converts, but he does want to gin up “strict, zealous Christianity” in them, that will steel them against persecution and make them fully committed to God. Again, the burden is shifted away from Jesus’ objective work in our behalf to a kind of whipping the converts up into a steely, ready-for-martyrdom mindset.²⁰

For example, this was for me the most troubling passage in the entire book:

¹⁹ Wright, *What St Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1997) and *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009).

²⁰ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 625-626.

“the point about faith is that it is the first-fruit of the work of the Spirit, operating in the human heart through the preaching of the Gospel...the verdict already issued over Christian faith in Romans 3 does indeed genuinely anticipate the verdict to be issued over the entirety of the life led...this is why, when Paul looks ahead to the future and asks, as well one might, what god will say on the last day, he holds up as his joy and crown, not the merits and death of Jesus, but the churches he has planted who remain faithful to the gospel. The path from initial faith to final resurrection (and resurrection, we must remind ourselves, constitutes rescue, that is, salvation from death itself) lies through holy and faithful Spirit-led service, including suffering...The Spirit is the one who enables God’s people to endure suffering without illusion but also without despair. We may even be right to suggest that, though the Spirit, the Christian engages in the present with the ongoing battle which derives from the victory on the cross. To put it another way, the ethical struggles of the Christian are the beginning of that sovereign rule over the created order which will be fulfilled in the new world. One’s own body is, so to speak, the small part of the created world over which one is given advance responsibility, against the day when much will be given to those from whom much, in the present, has been expected...we are called to produce, in a thousand different ways, signs of God’s new world within the apparently unpromising landscape of the old one.”²¹

Having lived in the world of pastoral ministry for 22 years, I hear that as just a more refined way of saying “it really is up to you to make a difference, and you can have heaven on earth if you are just willing to yield yourself to the Spirit in the right way. As Wright put it, “[Paul] clearly envisions not only a future judgment at the *bema tou Christou*, the Messiah’s

²¹ 148-151.

judgment seat, but also that this judgment will be in accordance with the entirety of the life that has been led.”²²

What does he mean by that? I know how I hear it. It sounds like God looks at the overall amount of good you have done or not done and that is how you can tell if you are wearing your baptism rightly—that is to say, if the good outweighs the bad, you will pass the judgment bar, for the Spirit has empowered your living. But is that the basis for our hope? Or is it that Messiah was perfect and we can have His righteousness counted as ours? Jesus said in Matthew 5:20, “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” I wouldn’t have passed muster as a Pharisee, so I know my own righteousness can’t exceed theirs. Unless there is a way I can have someone else’s be counted for mine. Now, going down the path of exploring the imputation of righteousness is certainly something that would take time—and Wright takes the time to do that analysis in *What St Paul Really Said*, and in his monograph *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision*. Read those two works if you’d like to investigate Wright on Justification.

V. Conclusion

Here is what I want to conclude with:

First, read Wright. By all means, read his books, his commentaries, and listen to him preach. Read him with open Bible and pen in hand. Truly, he will open up new, or perhaps as he would prefer “fresh,” perspectives on important texts. He will give you insights into what the world of St Paul was like—and how St Paul saw himself as both a Jew and a Roman, and how those worldviews informed his writing. N.T. Wright is at his absolute finest, I think, when he definitively shows that St Paul did not “invent” Christ, and that St Paul is not the founder of

²² 143.

Christianity. St Paul proved that Jesus was the Messiah to his audiences through careful exposition of the Old Testament, and N.T. Wright can demonstrate those facts better than about anyone else. His defense of the biblical doctrine of the Resurrection is also superb. He pokes a million holes in the “left behind” theology and shows that “frontier revival, individualized decision theology” is un-Pauline. I want to heap the most glowing praise on Wright that I can where these particular accomplishments are concerned.

So, learn from his scholarship—learn from his work ethic. Learn from the diligence he expends in investing in his work the hard work of study and scholarship. We all tend to get into grooves of thinking and this can be detrimental to our creativity and ability to see things from different points of view. Wright can really help us there.

Second, read the Thirty-Nine Articles, your prayerbook, and the Homilies alongside Wright. Do they square with what Wright teaches, *particularly where justification and substitutionary, propitiatory atonement*, is concerned? I think that question has an answer. In my opinion, *Trying to shoehorn any theological position into the Book of Common Prayer that is contrary to Reformation-era Reformed Catholicism that it espouses will run one into great difficulties*. I am utterly and deeply convinced that the 1662 Book of Common Prayer is shaped, molded, and informed by an evangelical, reformed catholic but thoroughly Reformation-based theology.²³ The Book of Common Prayer has the fingerprints of Cranmer all over it, and thus, we can say it is a product of Reformation era theology.

I know this is so, for Cranmer was steeped in Reformation theology. His conversations with both Lutherans and Reformed people wrote this theology on his heart and engraved it in his

²³ Consider the important contributions that Samuel Leuenberger made in understanding the BCP in his *Archbishop Cranmer's Immortal Bequest: The Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England: An Evangelistic Liturgy* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1990).

mind.²⁴ This Reformation theology is what his quill then scratched out when he and our other Anglican divines and reformers sat down at their parchments and papers.²⁵

We are a people of the Book—the Holy Bible is our first book, but we are also people of the Prayerbook, and our formularies are strongly, deeply shaped and molded by the theology of the Church Fathers (most certainly including Augustine, whom Dr Wright in *What St Paul Really Said* says was utterly wrong on justification), but also Luther, Peter Martyr, Martin Bucer, John Calvin, Henrich Bullinger, Nicholas Ridley, Matthew Parker and John Jewell.²⁶ Read those men themselves; don't take Wright's word on them as infallible. Those men were catholics in the best sense of that word, and our liturgy is deeply, deeply shaped by them. Anglicans should be deeply aware of the contributions that Lutheran theology made on our reformers in particular where the doctrines of justification are concerned. The Augsburg Confession's influence on our 39 Articles and in our Book of Homilies, particularly where the matter of salvation is concerned are indisputable. It is my strong opinion that Anglicans are “Lutheran on justification” if the XXXIX Articles mean anything to us at all—we are most like the Lutherans at the point of our soteriology than we are like anyone else.²⁷ Our Article 11 is clearly borrowed from the Augsburg Confession.²⁸ And frankly, this is a good thing, because almost every guiding light of the Reformation: Zwingli, Calvin, Bullinger, Cranmer, Melanchthon, etc. agreed with Luther on justification, whatever their differences otherwise.²⁹

²⁴ G. W. Bromiley, *Thomas Cranmer: Theologian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 28-41.

²⁵ See Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Faith and Works: Cranmer and Hooker on Justification* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1982), for evidences.

²⁶ He does this in *Justification*, saying that Pauline interpretation basically ran off the rails from Augustine forward.

²⁷ See A.G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (Glasgow: Fontana Press, 1964), 281 and 347.

²⁸ See W.H. Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology* (Philadelphia: Classical Anglican Press, 1996), 184; E.H. Browne, *An Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1892), 299; and John H. Rogers, *Essential Truths for Christians* (Philadelphia: Classical Anglican Press, 2011), 255.

²⁹ Steinmetz, 35.

Before swallowing “New Perspectivism”—and its rejection of what Wright calls the “Lutheran understanding” of justification by grace through faith, hook, line, and sinker, let us consider carefully the harm that advocating that view might do to our budding ecumenical relationships with the North American Lutheran Church, and the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod. This is to digress, but I feel it strongly: if we seek to be ecumenical, then we are right to pursue closer bonds with the Lutherans before we try to pursue close bonds with any other church body. I am happy with the work the ACNA has done to forge friendships with the NALC, and when I was an ACNA rector, the ongoing dialog that the ACNA had with the LCMS helped us forge an agreement to share space with a very gracious LCMS congregation, and hold our services in their building at a time different from theirs. May I ask you, if we adhere to the plain, literal and grammatical meaning of the XXXIX Articles, to whom are we most close? Discounting the articles on the sacraments, which are clearly informed by Reformed confessions, we seem to have more in common with the Lutherans than anyone else.

I know that there are strong connections between our Anglican Communion and the Orthodox branches of Christianity. I have read the works of Arthur Middleton who passionately urged us to explore our patristic heritage. I have read the works of Archbishop William Temple that stress the doctrine of the Incarnation over and against other hallmarks of what I might term a more evangelical understanding of Christianity would. That notwithstanding, I believe it would be a worthy goal to seek to forge deeper understandings with the Lutherans. I worry that widespread adoption of “The New Perspective on Paul” could throw a monkey wrench into the Lutheran/ACNA dialog: and that would be unfortunate to me.

Anglicans are people who are *Reformation* people—it is good to be a part of the Reformed Catholic tradition. Read what our formularies say about justification, election, and the

atonement and see where the New Perspective on Paul agrees or perhaps says something different. Then, do with the New Perspective theories what you will. Do the same with any theory. When what we read in any monograph or systematic theology resonates with Scripture and our formularies, we can rest assured in what they teach. When their words appear sound a different note, then we need to proceed with much more caution and care.

However, it is on the matter of justification by faith that discordance between Dr Wright's view and Article XI of the Thirty-Nine Articles was most palpable. Listen to Dr Wright:

“The point[about justification by faith] is this: God’s full and final revelation of his restorative justice, his plan to put the whole world to rights, is what will occur at the end, with the royal presence of Jesus as judge and savior. But this restorative justice, this covenant faithfulness through which creation itself will be redeemed, has been unveiled already, in advance in the apocalyptic events of Jesus’ messianic death and resurrection. Precisely in those events, as they are portrayed in the ‘gospel,’ the royal announcement made by Jesus’ apostolic heralds, God has declared in advance that he has dealt with sin and death, and has summoned the whole world to the obedience of faith, with the collar that all those who believe find themselves declared in advance, as part of the apocalyptic unveiling of the ultimate future, to be within God’s true family, whether they be Jew or Gentile. The whole point about ‘justification by faith’ is that it is something which happens in the present time (Romans 3:26) as a proper anticipation of the eventual judgment which will be announced, on the basis of the whole life led, in the future (Romans 2:1-16).³⁰

When I read the phrase “obedience of faith,” it makes me want to frown. But when I read the final line, “*the whole point about ‘justification by faith’ is that it is something which happens*

³⁰ Paul: *In Fresh Perspective*, 57.

in the present time...on the basis of the whole life led...” I get **more** concerned. What does N.T. Wright mean here? How can I explain that to someone in such a way as to not make it sound like I am telling them that it is their works that count most? “*Obedience of faith?*” “*Basis of the whole life led?*” No wonder the “Old Perspective” critics have expressed concern about the New Perspective theory of justification, on the basis of these remarks.

Now, consider what the XXXIX Articles say about justification:

Article XI, Of the Justification of Man

We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only, is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification.

Which is clearer on that point? Wright or the Articles? Which statement is giving us the best reading of Paul? I leave that to your investigation.

The Homily on Justification (which is actually titled Homily on the Salvation of Man), is in full accord with Article XI. Both teach the Reformation view on Justification, which is what Dr Wright says he is at pains to disprove. That gives me pause.

Because all men be sinners and offenders against God, and breakers of his law and commandments, therefore can no man by his own acts, works, and deeds (seem they never so good) be justified, and made righteous before God: but every man of necessity is constrained to seek for another righteousness or justification, to be received at God's own hands, that is to say,

the forgiveness of his sins and trespasses, in such things as he hath offended. And this justification or righteousness, which we so receive of God's mercy and Christ's merits, embraced by faith, is taken, accepted and allowed of God, for our perfect and full justification.

For the more full understanding hereof, it is our parts and duties ever to remember the great mercy of God, how that (all the world being wrapped in sin by breaking of the Law) God sent his only son our Saviour Christ into this world, to fulfil the Law for us, and by shedding of his most precious blood, to make a sacrifice and satisfaction, or (as it may be called) amends to his Father for our sins, to assuage his wrath and indignation conceived against us for the same. ... This is that justification or righteousness which S. Paul speaketh of, when he saith, No man is justified by the works of the Law, but freely by faith in Jesus Christ. And again he saith (Gal 2), We believe in Jesu Christ, that we be justified freely by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the Law, because that no man shall be justified by the works of the Law.

In the Communion Office, after the descriptive statements of the curses of the Law have been read out, there is an exhortation to repentance. It reads in part

Although we have sinned, yet have we an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous; and He is the propitiation for our sins. For He was wounded for our offences, and smitten for our wickedness. Let us therefore return unto him, who is the merciful receiver of all true penitent sinners; assuring ourselves that he is ready to receive us, and most willing to pardon us, if we come to him with faithful repentance...³¹

³¹ REC BCP, 49.

Thirdly, read Luther himself, Calvin himself. Do not be content to read what has been said about them by scholars. Engage with the texts. Read J.B. Lightfoot, especially his Commentary The Epistle of St Paul to the Galatians, with its extraordinary dissertation at the end entitled “St Paul and the Three”³², W.H. Griffith Thomas, H.C. G. Moule, Gerald Bray, and Bishop John Rogers alongside Wright. Especially read Luther on Galatians, and Lightfoot, Thomas and Moule, on Romans and Colossians alongside Wright’s commentaries. Please do not think because these writers pre-date Wright that they must necessarily teach the “old perspective” on Paul and therefore have no merits. Make sure that Wright fairly states what the “old perspective” really stood for, and taught. Luther, Calvin, and Augustine in no way make the Christian faith into a kind of frontier revivalism or so called “decision theology.” They make much of the church and our corporate identity.

Read Charles Simeon’s conversion account and see if it resonates with you. If ever there was an “Old Perspective on Paul” Anglican, who nevertheless loved the Book of Common Prayer, it was Simeon. Read Bishop Charles P. McIlvaine’s excellent book of addresses to ordinands entitled *Preaching Christ*. Let McIlvaine’s words on the Gospel of Jesus Christ wash all over you and wash all over your sermon manuscript.

IV. Pastoral Considerations

Finally, let me make one more pastoral case, again asking us to think about the issue of justification and Gospel proclamation in our parishes or other settings. *In Paul: In Fresh Perspective*, Wright seems to say that the most important task of the church is building unity among different peoples, proclaiming the covenant faithfulness of Messiah, and then using our

³² J.B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St Paul to the Galatians: Classic Commentary Library* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962).

unity and behavior as a tool of evangelism. As he put it, “*the imperative of the gospel meant, above all, unity.*”³³ The Church is sort of God’s answer to the United Nations, if you will, building goodwill, understanding and unity among all nations and races. Certainly the Church should be concerned with that. But is that the greatest concern we have? Does the rank and file person in the pew not need the gift of personal salvation? The Philippian Jailer asked “what must I do to be saved,” and however he meant that statement, St Paul answered “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” People are still asking that question, in a thousand ways, and we need to be prepared to answer them much as St Paul did.

In a collection of his sermons, given while he was Dean of Lichfield Cathedral, Dr Wright once preached on “Getting Back on the Road,” which was apparently a sermon on ecumenism during a week of Christian unity. In this sermon, he shows us how he would preach on his doctrine of justification. Here is an excerpt:

“Justification, of course, has been for four hundred years one of the main sticking points in discussions between Protestants and Catholics. Paul’s point, however, is this: if you understand justification by faith, you will be left in no doubt about who you may sit down and eat with. The whole discussion is about community definition.

The only badge of membership [in God’s family], therefore, is that which is the same for us all: the saving act of God in Christ Jesus, and the helpless acceptance of that by the believer, simply in the act of believing itself. That’s justification by faith. And that, not just a private spiritual experience, however dramatic, is what Paul is taking about in [Galatians 2:19-20, For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. (20) I have been crucified with

³³ 165.

Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.(ESV)]

You see, the whole point of the gospel for Paul, as he makes clear in several passages, is that through the achievement and announcement of King Jesus the principalities and powers, the local and tribal deities that have carved up the world between them, have had their power shaken to the roots. A new kingdom has been set up in which the old tribalisms, and the ideologies and idolatries that sustain them, have been declared redundant. And woe betide anyone who names the name of Christ but persists in worshipping, at least by implication, at the shrine of these old loyalties, no matter how venerable they seem.

All of which brings us, none too soon, to the thrust of all this wonderful Pauline theology. I return to the central point: justification by faith is not simply something which, if we work at it, we ought to be able to agree on; it is in fact, the doctrine which declares that all who believe in the Messiah Jesus belong at the same table, no matter what their ethnic, geographical, gender or class background. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Paul's doctrine of justification is the ecumenical doctrine."³⁴

While the point should never be lost on us that Jesus really is the universal savior for all people, and while there are some really wonderful sermons in the book *For All God's Worth*, is what he says here about justification by faith what the formularies of our church state?

Also, when Dr Wright writes about how the real import of *pistous Christou* is not about "faith in the Messiah" but "the faithfulness of the Messiah" to the covenant, and how that covenant keeping of the Messiah, and our election in Him is all about how you recognize who

³⁴ N.T. Wright, *For All God's Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1997), 105 & 109.

your brother and sister is, what hope does that give to the dying person who wonders what sort of eternity he or she will face? And is that not the most pressing question on the mind of someone about to depart into eternity? Can I face my Maker? And on what basis? To quote Dr Wright, “the doctrine of justification by faith was born into the world as the key doctrine underlying the unity of God’s renewed people.”³⁵ We do not often live life so pressed in by the question of “which of my neighbors is a Christian” so much as by the question is of “am I a Christian?” Most of the people I know, and especially those of whom I have served as a pastor, want to know, at the death bed, how can I know I am ready to face God?

So, imagine yourself in a small room with a person who is dying; never mind their age or the circumstances of their death. What will bring them assurance at that moment that they are ready to meet God Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth? Will a detailed and nuanced explanation of covenant renewal and how the overall tenor of the life they have lived will determine their faith help them at that moment? Will a plea for better, more realized ecumenism be what they want to hear?

Can you put Wright’s view of the atonement and justification in one or two sentences and meet the eyes of the dying and know you have given them real, genuine Christian hope? If so, fine. But I don’t think I could. I have been in that situation, and I suspect many of you have, too. If you haven’t, you will. I am telling you with 22 years’ worth of pastoral experience behind me: it is the theology like that which American Episcopal Bishop Charles P. McIlvaine gives in *Preaching Christ* or that of Swedish Lutheran bishop Bo Giertz in *The Hammer of God* that you want to have with you when you are kneeling or sitting down next to that person’s deathbed, not the theology that says take the sum of your behavior over your whole life and God will judge you on the basis of that.

³⁵ Ibid., 113.

My friends, you and I are right to reject frontier revivalism, decision-theology, and much of what we encounter in modern day popular evangelicalism. N.T. Wright does us all an immense favor when he defends the Resurrection, and when he punches holes in “rapture and left behind theology,” which he does in his writings. However, that does not mean we have to throw the Protestant Reformation out with that the evangelical bathwater. We do not have to jettison the Protestant Reformation’s doctrine of justification in order to reject decision theology. To do so is to reject the XXXIX Articles, the Homilies, and our Prayerbook. Do we really want to embrace Dr Wright’s renunciation of the Old Perspective, knowing that our Book of Common Prayer is steeped in the Old Perspective? Dr Wright would chide me on this point, for in his book *Justification*, he criticizes those who hold to the Old Perspective as ones who will hold to tradition at all costs. He says there that “Old Perspective on Paul” people are like the people who lived in the time of Copernicus, but refused to accept that the earth went around the sun.

However, if it comes down to it, I’d rather throw my lot in with Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer, who were willing to be burned at the stake over the “Old Perspective on Paul” than throw my lot in with Dr Wright and the doctrine of “justification at the end times based on the overall life lived.”

Let me be perfectly frank, as I close. Please let me take off the robes of the scholar and let me speak as a man who listens to more sermons than he delivers now days: every Sunday, when you stand before your lectern and deliver your homily, you are, in a very real sense, at the deathbed of your people. They are beaten up, fatigued, harried, and hard-pressed. They are told by every voice around them to strive, strive, and strive. They hear the voice of an accusing conscience more than not that tells them they are failures and are no good at all. From you, they need a sermon which is really just an exposition of the *Comfortable Words*, in their full orbed,

Reformation era understanding: *“Come unto Me, all you who labor and are burdened and I will refresh you.”*

Brothers, let us preach the Gospel of grace: Jesus Christ crucified, dead, buried, and risen; not a theory of justification, not a pattern of church government, not even a theory of how we recognize other Christians, but proclaim the Gospel itself. As the Holy Scriptures teach us, and as the Prayerbook liturgy reminds us each and every time the Holy Communion office is read: *This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance: Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.*

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