



Retelling the Story: A Review of *Simply Christian*, by N.T. Wright

While there are various re-tellings or re-imaginings of the Christian story out there, from what I have read of them I can commend Norman T. Wright's *Simply Christian* more than most. It is thoroughly orthodox in its expression of the faith we hold, and yet it has a fresh and relevant way of telling the story without being folksy or irreverent.

Wright begins with what may be his most important contribution, and that is raising four questions, or "echoes of a voice," within contemporary society -- the longing for justice, the quest for spirituality, the hunger for relationships, and the delight in beauty -- areas which he identifies in a postmodern, post-Christian society as "strange signposts pointing beyond the landscape of our contemporary culture and out into the unknown." It's a helpful place to begin, as in an increasingly pluralistic society and one in which truth is devalued, these are helpful points of connection, as every TV show, movie, and song point to one or more of these areas. Wright helps us flesh out what questions people are asking, what drives them, and why.

In Part Two of the book, he relates the Christian story, demonstrating how the Story offers itself as the answer to the questions raised in Part One. And yet it's not a simplistic reading of the questions but one that appreciates the complexity of the struggle for meaning and community. What he relates is an amplification of the "mere Christianity" of C.S. Lewis. In chapters on God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, he fleshes out the meaning of what Christians believe. It's not a simple reading, and yet the fresh prose makes it easy to read. A non-Christian could read this book and have an understanding of what Christians believe without all the confusing nuances of different strains of belief (whether Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox,; Calvinism or Arminianism). Something does suffer in the effort, that is, by drawing down the Story to its basics some of the richness is missed, but the generalizing is worth it given the book's purpose.

Finally, the author describes Christian practice, with chapters on prayer, scripture, and Christian living. In the last chapter he returns to the questions posed by Part One and tries to suggest how the Christian story and the Christian life is lived out in answer to these longings -- not as simply biding our time until Jesus returns for us, but as a new creation awaiting its restoration:

"The New Testament picks up from the Old the theme that God intends, in the end, to put the whole creation to rights. Earth and heaven were made to overlap one another, not fitfully, mysteriously, and partially as they do at the moment, but completely, gloriously, and utterly. . . . The great drama will end, not with 'saved souls' being snatched up into heaven, away from the wicked earth and the mortal bodies which have dragged them down into sin, but with

the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven to earth, so that 'the dwelling of God is with humans' (Revelation 21:3)."

I'm thankful for N.T. Wright's retelling of a story I thought I knew well. I'm grateful too for his acute sense of what our culture longs for rather than, I confess, my dismissive approach to it at times as beyond repair and hopelessly lost and decadent. He gives me hope for where revival of the Story may come when it comes -- out of the midst of these "echoes."