

## Review

Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Great Story and the Great Commission: Participating in the Biblical Drama of Mission*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023. ISBN: 9781540966162. \$31.99.

By Blayne A. Banting, DMin, PhD

*The Great Story and the Great Commission* is a helpful abridgement and popularization of some of Christopher Wright's more substantive works on the form and function of the biblical (meta) narrative and the mission of God's people. The original occasion for the book was Wright's delivery of the 2020 Hayward Lectures at Acadia Divinity College in Wolfville, Nova Scotia and was brought to print as a volume in the Acadia Studies in Bible and Theology series. Since the book is a printed copy of a public lecture series, the emphasis is more on the communication of the biblical theologies of the biblical narrative and the mission of God's people than making a startling new contribution to the scholarly conversation on these matters. This is not to say Wright is only summarizing in this volume, since it bears the mark of a keen scholarly mind always at work in refining his previous work in these fields of study.

As the book title suggests, Wright addresses both the Great Story (the biblical narrative) and the Great Commission (the mission of God's people) although a greater portion of the attention is paid to the latter over the former. While it is not necessary to be familiar with Wright's more scholarly works to receive great benefit from this small volume, it is helpful to see the work in light of three of Wright's previous titles in particular. These include *The Mission of God* (IVP Academic, 2006), *The Mission of God's People* (Zondervan, 2010), and "*Here Are Your Gods*" (IVP Academic, 2020), the latter of which is where most of Wright's illustrative figures are to be found.

Wright develops a missional hermeneutic from his first three chapters which address aspects of the Great Story. He defines a missional hermeneutic as "a method of reading and interpreting the Bible from three major perspectives, which are complementary to one another. The Bible can be viewed as "the *record* [missional framework and direction of the Story], the *product* [missional origin of the Bible], and the *tool* [missional aim of the Bible] of God's mission" (1, 2, italics mine).

Wright proceeds to demonstrate how the Bible can be read as a seven-act drama with the guiding missional plotline holding it all together. The seven acts are identified as Creation (God, humanity, earth), Rebellion (the fall), Promise (OT

Israel), Christ (Gospel), Mission (NT church), Judgment (God puts all things right), and New Creation (God, redeemed humanity, new heaven and earth). Each of these acts are given an accompanying symbol so the whole story can be aided and represented by a series of seven symbols. Wright inserts the sixth act of Judgment before the final act of the New Creation into the drama which differentiates his approach from many who have posited a total of six acts in the drama. He insists, “God must put all things right before he makes all things new” (31). The third chapter builds the bridge to the second part of the book by demonstrating how living by this missional understanding of the Bible spurs us on to living on mission.

The second section of the book deals with the Great Commission or the mission of God’s people. Foundational to his discussion of this theme is his acceptance of what he terms the Five Marks of Mission developed within his own Anglican communion, starting in 1984. These five marks are:

The mission of the church is the mission of Christ

- 1) to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom;
- 2) to teach, baptise and nurture new believers;
- 3) to respond to human need by loving service;
- 4) to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation;
- 5) to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth (68).

Wright affirms all five of these marks can be grounded in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) provided the lordship of Christ is considered central to them all. These five marks are further simplified by dividing the mission of the church into three focal points of building the church (evangelism, teaching), serving society (justice and compassion), and ruling over and caring for creation (creation responsibility). While there would appear to be a certain order of priority of these five marks, Wright staunchly supports the necessity of the integrating them all in calling for the “”centrality of the gospel” rather than the “primacy of evangelism”” (80) so that Christians maintain a theocentric understanding of the gospel as what God has done rather than an anthropocentric understanding that highlights what they do in mission. This may raise eyebrows among some, but Wright continues to develop these five marks in the remainder of the book. What seems most obvious in this part of the book is the weighting toward the fifth mark of creation care. This theme has been addressed in both *The Mission of God* (Chapter

12) and *The Mission of God's People* (Chapter 3) but has not received the degree of attention Wright gives to it in this book.

Wright's book is an enlightening and thought-provoking read whether one is familiar with his previous works (reading *The Mission of God* and *The Mission of God's People* together constitute about 850 pages of reading). This condensed version of 150 pages gives an accurate and enjoyable outline of the current thought of a significant voice in biblical studies and missional theology. There is some evidence that he has been formed by his Anglican roots in his commitment to the Five Marks of Mission (which are also found in other traditions as well) and in his desire to place baptism as a significant aspect of mission. His work far exceeds his denominational boundaries and speaks to the entire Church, and it is this quality of the work that I would commend to all who serve God by being committed to both his great story and the mission of his people.

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