

**EPICUREANISM AND PROVIDENTIAL DEISM: N. T. WRIGHT AND
CHARLES TAYLOR ON NATURAL THEOLOGY**

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Abstract: While the practice of Natural Theology (NT) is widespread among Christians, Charles Taylor argues that the practice is simply a remake of what he defines as Providential Deism. On a similar, yet more nuanced view, N. T. Wright believes NT has become trapped within the frame of Epicureanism. After analyzing the major claims of each author, I have concluded that their concerns can benefit the practice of NT, and in my article I suggest how that could be done.

Key Words: Epicureanism, Natural Theology, Secularity, Historiography, Deism.

**EPICURISMO DEÍSMO PROVIDENCIAL: N. T. WRIGHT E CHARLES
TAYLOR SOBRE A TEOLOGIA NATURAL**

Resumo: Por mais que a prática da Teologia Natural (TN) seja habitual entre cristãos, Charles Taylor propõe que a prática seja apenas uma reformulação daquilo que ele define como Deísmo Providencial. De maneira similar, porém com mais nuance, N. T. Wright acredita que a TN se tornou presa aos padrões do Epicurismo. Após uma análise das principais formulações de cada autor, eu concluo que suas preocupações com a TN podem acabar beneficiando a prática da mesma. Meu artigo apresenta uma proposta de como a TN pode se beneficiar de Taylor e Wright.

Palavras-Chave: Epicurismo, Teologia Natural, Secularismo, Historiografia, Deísmo.

1.1 Introduction

Unbelief has the ability of creeping into the most undesired places. The resurrection of Jesus, for example, was first doubted not by skeptical modern scholars, but by his own disciples. Matthew believes that disbelief in Jesus started while he was still on earth (cf. Matthew 28:17). Luke recorded Paul's last appeals to the Jews in Rome in apologetic format, presumably because not all believed the "Christian"¹¹⁰

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¹¹⁰ I believe the term "Christian" is anachronistic for this period, since "Christianity" was sprung from Second Temple Judaism. I am simply using this term for the sake of convenience. See Paula Fredriksen, *When Christians Were Jews: The First Generation* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2018).

narrative to be self-evident (Acts 17; 21-28).¹¹¹ The apologetic method has evolved precisely due to the attacks on early Christians and unbelief.¹¹² The methodology and presentation of the arguments found in William Paley,¹¹³ or even in the contemporary William Lane Craig,¹¹⁴ for example, differ from those of the late Apologists¹¹⁵ and even of Paul himself. Charles Taylor believes that the late apologetic method has grounded Natural Theology (NT) within the frame of Providential Deism (PD).¹¹⁶ On a similar yet distinguished manner, N. T. Wright argues that the modern NT project has conceded too much to Epicureanism.¹¹⁷ If Taylor and Wright are correct, then proponents of modern apologetic methods should take heed to the critiques. New questions, however, demand new answers. After evaluating their claims, it will become clear that NT has attempted to respond to issues not present during the Christian origins, and the constructive criticism presented by Taylor and Wright can aid proponents of NT to function in a more biblically-historical (Wright) and sociologically-conscious way (Taylor).

1.2 Bridging Contexts

Psalm 14 and 1 Peter 3:15 are usually quoted side by side in a way to defend Classic Apologetics.¹¹⁸ The social context of Psalm 14, different from the twenty first century's, is not a world of skepticism and disbelief.¹¹⁹ Moreover, the context of 1 Peter 3:15 does not seem to argue that believers should present "epistemologically neutral" philosophical arguments to persuade unbelievers that there might be a Higher Being out

¹¹¹ Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 325-327.

¹¹² Everett Ferguson, *Church History: From Christ to Pre-Reformation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2005), 66-79.

¹¹³ William Paley, *Natural Theology, or Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity* (Edinburg: William & Robert Chambers, 1849);

¹¹⁴ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2008).

¹¹⁵ Spencer Mansel, "Apologetics," in *A Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects and Doctrines*, vol.1 eds. by William Smith and Henry Wace (London: John Murray, 1877-1887), 140-148.

¹¹⁶ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 293-294.

¹¹⁷ N. T. Wright, "Discerning the Dawn: History, Eschatology and New Creation" (Gifford Lectures 2018, University of Aberdeen). In order to facilitate finding the mentions referenced, all citations to this lecture will bear the name of the specific lecture the paper refers to.

¹¹⁸ For an overview and defense of Classic Apologetics, see William Lane Craig's essay on *Five Views on Apologetics*, eds. Stanley Gundry and Steven Cowan (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2000).

¹¹⁹ Randal Rauser, *Is the Atheist My Neighbor? Rethinking Christian Attitudes Toward Atheism* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 33-37.

“there.”¹²⁰ Though there were certainly skeptic philosophers in the ancient world, skepticism was only adopted as a worldview in the last 500 years or so.¹²¹

The prevalent concept in the Greco-Roman world was polytheism, not atheism.¹²² It is not surprising, then, that the Jewish Shema is central in Paul’s theology (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:1-6; Ephesians 4:1-6; and 1 Timothy 2:1-6).¹²³ On the one hand, classical apologists need to admit that the world of the New Testament has little to nothing in common with the Post-Postmodern world they find themselves in. On the other hand, historians and sociologists such as Taylor and Wright must come to understand that apologetics is not attempting to answer old questions—new questions demand new answers.

2. Epicureanism and Natural Theology

Wright argues that Epicureanism is a sort of proto-Deism.¹²⁴ Epicureanism is characterized by the insistence on metaphysical dualism, which detaches the deities and the heavens from humans and the natural world.¹²⁵ For Epicurus, the deities did not likely create the world, but even if they did, they would be far removed from humans and their space.¹²⁶ The problem of miracles, such as Hume’s,¹²⁷ can be conceived within this framework, for the world has been separated into natural (nature) and divine (supernatural).¹²⁸ The most poetic of the canonical gospels, John, presents Easter as the

¹²⁰ Michael Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2013), 189.

¹²¹ John Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2015), 77; Jennifer Nagel, *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 13-28.

¹²² Larry W. Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2016), 44-52.

¹²³ Douglas S. Huffman and Jamie N. Hausherr, “The Shema,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, eds. John Barry, David Bomar, Derek Brown, Rachel Klippenstein, Douglas Magnum, Carrie Sinclair Wolcott, Lazarus Wentz, Elliot Ritzema, and Wendy Widder (Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press, 2016).

¹²⁴ Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1992), 155.

¹²⁵ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2013), 212.

¹²⁶ Wright, *The New Testament and the People God*, 155; *Finding God in the Psalms: Sing, Pray, Live* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2014), 17-18.

¹²⁷ For Hume, a “miracle” would be a violation of the “natural” by the God (supernatural). The problem itself assumes a two-tiered worldview. Hume had, of course, more reasons to doubt the existence of God.

¹²⁸ Wright, *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978-2013* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 458.

place where God's sphere and the natural world come together.¹²⁹ John presents Jesus as the unification of the natural and human and the supernatural and divine. Wright's approach does not, as some might think, lead one into Pantheism, for the author is not speaking of the ontological difference between created and uncreated things.¹³⁰ Instead, Wright is speaking of the metaphor of heaven and earth in Christian Scripture, and how such metaphor is used to bridge the gap between those two different spaces in one's conception of the world and how the divine realm operates. Thus, for Wright, any attempt to "prove" Jesus's divine status by looking at his "unusual" miracle events, for example, buys into the heaven-earth divide that John's temple theology attempts to bridge.¹³¹ The Christian goal would then be the unification of both realities (i.e., "event X is both human *and* divine").

Due to the divide, Epicureanism also presents a problem for the resurrection. If miracles cannot happen, if the resurrection of Jesus is claimed to be a physical rather than spiritual one,¹³² then the resurrection cannot be true. The Enlightenment was not the movement that brought about disbelief concerning the possibility of humans to be raised from the dead.¹³³ Homer and others knew very well that dead people stay dead.¹³⁴ The resurrection, however, was an event that, in Christian literature, happened in *history*.¹³⁵ As *history*, then, it must be dealt with.¹³⁶

¹²⁹ Wright, *The Scriptures, The Cross and the Power of God* (London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2005), 60, 77.

¹³⁰ Wright, *Paul: Fresh Perspectives* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2005), 87.

¹³¹ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1996), 186-192.

¹³² Wright is rather emphatic on the nature of the Jesus's raised body. As Stephen Kuhrt puts it, for Wright, "resurrection" is only physical—anything else is not resurrection. See his summary of Wright's position on Tom Wright for *Everyone: Putting the Theology of N. T. Wright into Practice in the Local Church* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2011), 38-39.

¹³³ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2003), 10, 34.

¹³⁴ Homer, *Iliad* 2.549-551; Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 647; Herodotus, *Histories* 3.62.3, *et al.*

¹³⁵ Here Wright does not merely accept Presuppositionalism, but argues that through abduction and the historical-critical method, the best explanation for all the phenomena is that Jesus materially came back from the dead. See Wright, "The Shifting Sand: The Meanings of 'History'" (February 19, 2018).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 20-24. Though Wright's presentation depends on the reality of the resurrection, my addition that the resurrection is an event in history within Christian literature allows for both those who affirm or deny the resurrection to work with his method. What is important is the literary reality, not historical factuality (though that is an important topic).

Wright believes NT ends up de-historicizing the resurrection in an attempt to “prove” it. Mathematical proofs will not do the job;¹³⁷ very few things in life are known with that kind of certainty.¹³⁸ Efforts to give certainty regarding the resurrection give too much to Cartesian schools of thought, and prevent the knower from the highest type of knowledge, which Wright entitles “Epistemology of Love”.¹³⁹ This method is Wright’s approach to critical-realism,¹⁴⁰ which rejects “objectivity” as a possibility regarding how we approach evidence. One of the main contentions of Wright’s method is that writings must be understood in their primary historical context.¹⁴¹ Thus, the questions that ought to be raised when reading the Gospels, for example, are not modern ones, but those contemporary to those writings.¹⁴² Modern skepticism and doubts, then, must be addressed through the lenses of Bible in its proper historical context.¹⁴³

For Wright, NT might attempt to look at the natural world and work its way up to God, but it will inevitably fail for two reasons. First, it will have to buy into the Bultmannian framework that separated history and theology.¹⁴⁴ This might bridge the ditch between the natural and supernatural world, but there will still be a ditch—heaven and earth have not yet come together.¹⁴⁵ Gnosticism is the right-hand partner of Epicureanism, and thus cannot be the solution to the problem.¹⁴⁶

Second, NT might provide arguments for the *Omni God* of the philosophers, but it will fall short of providing evidence for the suffering Messiah found in the Gospels and in Paul.¹⁴⁷ The cross affirms human suffering and experientially shares with the evil of the world, and the resurrection reaffirms the goodness of creation and redeems that

¹³⁷ See, for example, Richard Swinburne, *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 204-215.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 688, 720. By “mathematical proofs” I mean approaches with Bayes’ Theorem that attempt to assure the audience of the “more likeliability” of a given event. Wright’s argument is that most things in life are not known with certainty—in fact most of the more important things in life do not demand Cartesian certainty. It must be pointed out, however, that Wright’s approach towards the resurrection via abduction is the same methodology utilized by Craig.

¹³⁹ Wright, “A New Creation: Resurrection and Epistemology” (February 28, 2018). This is an experiential knowledge, which is not “public.” It is not easily falsifiable by 3rd-person-propositional content because it does not depend on such evidence.

¹⁴⁰ Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 64.

¹⁴¹ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 133.

¹⁴² Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 339-464.

¹⁴³ Wright, *The Shifting Sand*.

¹⁴⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, “History and Eschatology” (University of Edinburgh, Gifford Lectures 1954-1955).

¹⁴⁵ Wright, *Who Was Jesus?* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1992), 6-8.

¹⁴⁶ Craig Evans and N. T. Wright, *Jesus, the Final Days* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2008), 102.

¹⁴⁷ Wright, “Broken Signposts? New Answers for the Right Questions” (March 5, 2018).

which is now evil and broken.¹⁴⁸ Weakness and brokenness are recognized and rightly dealt with at the resurrection, once it is understood as a historical event in Christian literature.¹⁴⁹ This differs radically from the Omni representations of NT. And if the choice is between the True Human One (Son of Man) who suffers and, as the Suffering One, is recognized as the true image of God (cf. Colossians 1), or the Omni God of the philosophers, then Wright assures the reader that early Christianity has more in common with the former.¹⁵⁰

3. Providential Deism and Natural Theology

Taylor defines Providential Deism (PD) as the intermediate form of Exclusive Humanism.¹⁵¹ It is the orthodox version of Deism that has suffered an anthropological shift.¹⁵² After disenchanting reality, Western society was left under the immanent frame. Once the church rejected white magic, all magic was deemed evil.¹⁵³ What was magical (such as a healing) is now interpreted without reference to God (or his evil counterpart, Satan), and reality slowly becomes more and more separated from the heavens.¹⁵⁴

This is similar to Wright's account of the heaven-earth split. Taylor points out that in this frame of PD, God still maintain his attributes of creator and sustainer.¹⁵⁵ What is lost is the role of the redeemer, rightly emphasized by Wright. What NT ends up with is an Omni God that lacks some of his most important features, while it unnaturally elevates others. He is definitely omnipotent, but the weakness of God at the cross is lost—the redemption of creation is abandoned.¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁸ Wright, *Paul: Fresh Perspectives*, 173.

¹⁴⁹ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 307-309.

¹⁵⁰ In his last lecture, Wright suggests different and fresh approaches to NT that might take in account his epistemology of love and history. See Wright, "The Waiting Chalice: Natural Theology and the Missio Dei" (March 7, 2018).

¹⁵¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 19.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 221.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 143. Granted, this makes no justice to Taylor's extensive dealing on how history was not "progressive" and how Exclusive Humanism was not "inevitable." The reductionist accounts here are only due to the space allowed for my writing.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 324, 365, cf. 652 and 761-764.

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With a society completely focused on discipline and order, God receives the Genesis role of organizing reality.¹⁵⁷ The shift being that God now works *for* humans, and his goals are, “coincidentally”, the same ones of the West: human flourishing, order, and freedom. The image of God remains, but as Taylor admits, it is certainly not enough to defend Christianity against Exclusive Humanism. It affirms God is the Provider, but he is certainly not breaking into the social order to infuse it with his miracles—that would be *un*-natural, and thus not God-like.¹⁵⁸

The problem with NT, then, is that it builds its fortress around the points that were granted by the secularization of the West.¹⁵⁹ The world is as good as its order, thus the teleological argument; there is good and evil (and humans can recognize that), thus the moral argument, and so on. God comes to life through the analysis of the world.¹⁶⁰ But he comes not as the suffering Son of God from the Gospels, but as one of the parts of this larger picture called the universe (teleological and cosmological arguments) and reason (ontological and moral arguments).

Though these arguments have biblical similarities—Psalm 19 for teleology, Genesis 1 for cosmology, etc.—they became more popular in “convenient” times. The arguments that were presented primarily after the French Revolution were the ones of design and order.¹⁶¹ It is no less of a coincidence that the cosmological argument is the forefront of the enterprise in the triumph of physics.¹⁶²

Apologetics for Taylor, then, buys into the immanent frame, and attempts to argue for the attributes that secularity allowed NT to use. God is the provider, but his reality is still separated from earth’s. God is good, but now theodicies are needed to deal with the evil of the world. Atheism presents itself as the *spin* of the secular age, while Christianity merely shows a *take* on reality.¹⁶³ To salvage NT, the Christian must eat

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 233.

¹⁵⁸ “We are grateful for his Providence [...]; but this providence remains exclusively general: particular providences and miracles are out.” Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 294; Jason A. Mahn, “Reforming Formation: The Practices of Protestantism in a Secular Age,” in *Currents in Theology and Mission* 40, no. 5 (2013): 307.

¹⁶⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 334, 342.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 456.

¹⁶² William Lane Craig and Paul Copan, *The Kalam Cosmological Argument*, vol. 1 (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 1.

¹⁶³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 550-555.

and point out the atheist is also eating from the postmodernist feast—the world is just the world, and all human access to it is just their *take* on reality.¹⁶⁴

4. New Questions, New Answers: Considering Taylor and Wright's Remarks

The Bible is God's word in human words.¹⁶⁵ The New Testament contains fiction, myth, history, prophecy, and many other genres. Wright recognizes that it would be a disservice to the Bible to look at it as if it was a textbook in which one can simply find answers to life whenever one needs them.¹⁶⁶ Simply stated, the Bible does not have answers for every issue in life. Despite that, this book is still considered as the center of authority for Protestant believers.¹⁶⁷ The Bible, then, cannot be used as a schoolbook for responses, which demands other tools to respond to the new challenges to the faith: natural revelation and reason.¹⁶⁸ In a secular age, believers are not merely propagators of the faith, but also defenders of it.¹⁶⁹ NT, then, appropriating itself of those two tools, can serve the purpose of verifying statements concerning the existence of God and its nature. Wright's proposal is not enough, then, given the validity of new questions and the need to address them from a Christian perspective.

Paul talked to the philosophers as a philosopher in Acts 17. Taylor is correct in that it is not merely "coincidence" that arguments for order and morality came about after the French Revolution. It is possible that theologians were intentionally supplying the need: just as Paul saw the need to act as a philosopher with the philosophers, NT saw the need to speak of order and morality amidst destruction and corruption.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, apologists are not merely making their case with what secularity "gave"

¹⁶⁴ James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 96.

¹⁶⁵ Alluding to Kenton Sparks's *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008).

¹⁶⁶ Wright, "The Waiting Chalice"; *Scripture and the Authority of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2005), 23-26.

¹⁶⁷ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 511.

¹⁶⁸ On the pillars of Evangelical scholarship, see John Jefferson Davis, *Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984), 75-117.

¹⁶⁹ Graham Ward, "History, Belief and Imagination in Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*," in *Modern Theology* 26, no.3 (2010): 340.

¹⁷⁰ For an argument that order must be part of any approach to public life and individual order, see Adam Chmielewski, "Particles in Space: Charles Taylor and Political Aesthetics," in *Charles Taylor's Vision of Modernity: Reconstructions and Interpretations*, eds. Christopher Garbowski, Jan Klos, and Jan Hudzik (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 30.

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them, though no one can “step out” of the immanent frame. A better understanding of the purpose of NT and apologetics is that they are establishing points of contact with their own age in order to communicate effectively.¹⁷¹ Wright’s own 2013 book on the doctrine of creation is an attempt to bridge the gap between the twenty-first century world and the first century one.¹⁷²

Admittedly, NT and Wright bridge cultural gaps in very different ways. While Wright brings his readers back to the first century, modern apologists bring the concepts of the first century to the twenty-first. Proponents of NT will likely deny that their method is based on the distinction of event and theology: God came in history, and he intentionally came in a particular time (cf. Galatians 4).¹⁷³ God decided to reveal himself through one culture, and it was not the modern Western one.¹⁷⁴ NT has rightly emphasized the implications of space-time-matter in cosmological arguments, but it has forgotten to deal with the Jewish cosmology that saw the temple as the place where heaven meets earth, and the Sabbath as the time where God-reality is united with human reality.¹⁷⁵ This unity was initiated in the resurrection (thus no more Sabbath mentions in the New Testament), and this world must be presented, through abduction—as the best *take* on reality that is available. It would be interesting, then, to see apologists connecting their conclusions with Jewish cosmology, thus allowing theologians and popular audiences to maintain the Bible’s historical background while addressing new matters.

New times bring new questions, but these questions must always point to the historical revelation of Jesus, not merely to principles and abstractions. Theology should bring the focus back to Christian history, not away from it—history is the frame that

¹⁷¹ Taylor, at times, seems to narrow the role of the Church too much. Gallagher argues that Taylor suffocates the role of the Church by demanding too much from it, while not giving it enough space. See Michael Paul Gallagher, “Translating Taylor: Pastoral and Theological Horizons,” in *The Taylor Effect: Responding to a Secular Age*, eds. Ian Leask, Eoin Cassidy, Alan Kearns, Fainche Ryan, and Mary Shanahan (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 113-123, especially 117.

¹⁷² Wright, *Creation, Power and Truth: The Gospel in a World of Cultural Confusion* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2013), xi.

¹⁷³ Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), 39-46. In fact, it is told here in the US that Daniel B. Wallace argues that from the time God became a man, he opened himself for historical investigation. I would go further and say from the moment the world was created, human beings were given the right to wonder about the divine.

¹⁷⁴ There is a lot that needs to be said regarding the “priorization” of one culture over another, but space does not allow for such excursus.

¹⁷⁵ Wright, “The Stone the Builders Rejected? Temple, Messiah and Sabbath” (February 26, 2018).

contextualizes the painting of abstractions and principles.¹⁷⁶ Communication can only happen when there are points of contact—Genesis 1-11 would make little sense in a world without *Gilgamesh* or the *Enuma Elish*.¹⁷⁷ As communication, NT is required to utilize the language and concepts available in the world today. Abstracting principles from history is problematic, as Taylor and Wright have argued. Thus, as redeemed communication, Christian NT must always return to God’s self-disclosure in Jesus.

5. Conclusion

Taylor and Wright have fair and constructive critiques on NT. Wright does not believe the practice should cease, and there is no indication that Taylor is against NT itself.¹⁷⁸ Wright has rightly argued that NT needs “reform”, and it will start as it brings its audience back to the Jewish first century world. Furthermore, Taylor and Wright have also recognized that NT, at times, presents a God that is different than the Jesus of the New Testament. Since Paul believes Jesus to be the highest revelation of God (cf. Colossians 1), NT must be brought back to the suffering Messiah. This can provide fresh starts to theodicy and ethics.

The practice of NT must continue, for it serves an important role in addressing the new questions that were not present in Jesus’ times. But as a Christian practice, and thus a communal practice, it must take into account the critiques from historians and sociologists regarding its own initiative. With Taylor, NT can situate itself in the twenty-first century, and with Wright, NT can preserve the historical context of the first century.

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¹⁷⁶ On the problems related to abstractions of the school of “Biblical Theology,” see John H. Hayes and Frederick Prussner, *Old Testament Theology: Its History & Development* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1934), 209-218.

¹⁷⁷ John Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 6-8.

¹⁷⁸ Wright, “The Waiting Chalice”; on taking Taylor’s critiques into account and developing pastoral theology that recognizes the need of apologetics, see Fergus Kerr, “Challenging Issues About The Secular Age,” in *Modern Theology* 26, no. 3 (2010): 410.

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