

## A Comparative Book Review of Fleming Rutledge's, *The Crucifixion* and N.T. Wright's, *The Day the Revolution Began*

Robert Falconer

Rutledge F 2015. *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Wright NT 2016. *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion*. New York: HarperOne.

### 1. Personal Profiles

#### 1.1. Fleming Rutledge

Fleming Rutledge is an Episcopal priest, being one of the first women to be ordained to the priesthood of the Episcopal Church in 1977, and is recognized in North America and Britain as a preacher, lecturer, and teacher of other preachers. She attended the General Theological Seminary and received her Master of Divinity from Union Theological Seminary in New York. Rutledge was assistant and later senior associate at Grace Church in New York City for 14 years, and served as interim rector of St. John's Church in Salisbury, Connecticut. Furthermore, she has twice been a resident Fellow at the Centre of Theological Inquiry at Princeton, a resident at Wycliffe College in the University of

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

Toronto School of Theology, and was also a visiting scholar at the American Academy in Rome (Amazon 2017:online).

## 1.2. N.T. Wright

N.T. Wright was the Bishop of Durham in the Church of England, and is noted not only as a prolific writer, but also as a leading Bible scholar. Currently, he serves as the Chair of New Testament and Early Christianity at the School of Divinity at the University of St Andrews, Scotland. Previously, he taught New Testament studies at Cambridge, McGill and Oxford Universities. Apart from his many popular books, which include, *How God Became King* (2012), *Simply Jesus* (2011), *After You Believe* (2010), *Surprised by Hope* (2008), *Simply Christian* (2006), *Scripture and the Authority of God* (2005), Wright has also authored the scholarly *Christian Origins and the Question of God* series, these include, *The New Testament and the People of God* (1992), *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996), *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (2003), and *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (2013).

## 2. Introduction

A comparison of Fleming Rutledge's, *The Crucifixion* and N.T. Wright's, *The Day the Revolution Began*, makes for an interesting study. There are similarities and differences; (1) Both books were published almost a year apart, (2) Rutledge is an American Episcopal priest, and Wright, a British theologian, and formally an Anglican bishop, thus both write from a similar church tradition with pastoral sentiments. (3) Rutledge and Wright both make mention of the atonement in the light of apartheid, Desmond Tutu's work in reconciliation, Martin Luther King, Jr, and the 2015 Charleston church shooting, in South Carolina. (4) it appears that Rutledge understands Paul's writings from the viewpoint of the Apocalyptic Paul, whereas Wright is a serious advocate of the New Pauline Perspective.<sup>2</sup> (5) The style of each book is, however, different. Rutledge's book is scholarly, but accessible to laity. Wright's book, on the other hand, was written at a popular level, and yet is challenging and deeply theological.

This comparative book review would be too lengthy if all the important issues from both books were addressed. It is expedient rather to offer a brief summary and evaluation of each book, and then to compare three common and significant themes, namely; (1) Sin, (2) Penal Substitutionary Atonement and (3) Justification.

<sup>2</sup> The Apocalyptic Paul is a recent theological trend among Pauline scholars, and while the New Pauline Perspective (NPP) is not very recent, it has been popularized by Wright and is often considered controversial in many circles, especially among Reformed theologians. A helpful sketch of the four main views in Pauline theology can be found in Michael Bird's lecture, *A Story of Paul's Theology Between Messianic Event and Salvation History*, accessed here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=12\\_VLaZmsc4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=12_VLaZmsc4)

### 3. Brief Summary and Evaluation

#### 3.1. Rutledge

Rutledge's volume, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the death of Jesus Christ*, won *Christianity Today's* 2017 *Beautiful Orthodoxy Book* of the Year. While the book is suitable for scholars, it offers something for congregants as well. The question is often asked, 'Why did Jesus have to die?'. Rutledge believes that the correct question to ask is, 'Why was Jesus crucified?'. The focus ought to be on the manner of Jesus' death, not merely on the death itself. This emphasis is highlighted throughout the book. She explores the horrific crucifixion of Jesus as the link between justice and righteousness, which other modes of execution would not offer. Hence, God in this way chose to demonstrate his love for his human creatures. Crucifixion emphasized 'the dehumanisation of the victim; declaring another person less than human' (Rutledge 2015:80). The book argues that if the cross of Christ were not at the very centre of the Christian proclamation, the narrative of Jesus' life would be just another story about a charismatic spiritual preacher. However, she explains that 'it is the crucifixion that marks out Christianity as something definitively different in the history of religion. It is in the crucifixion that the nature of God is truly revealed' (p. 44). Jesus' death is therefore uniquely different from that of the martyrs, having unique significance. Various atonement themes are articulated in detail, but it is argued in the book that one should not favour one theme over against another. Rutledge attempts to find the 'creative balance between doctrine and artistry, responding not only to the problems put by the biblical text (but) also to its narrative structure, poetry, and language' (p. 9). With much praise, the Roman Catholic Bishop, Robert Barron, highlighted the strangeness of the cross in the book, reflecting on how Rutledge defamiliarized and de-domesticated the cross (2016:online). At one point in the book she makes a comment reminiscent of Wright's work, that if it were not for the cross of Christ, we would still be Greeks and Jews with nothing *revolutionary* to offer the world.

Despite the book's disapproval of *penal* in penal substitution, Rutledge's, *The Crucifixion*, is a masterpiece, which offers all Christians a profound theology on the atonement, which is rooted in both Scripture and historical theology.

#### 3.2. Wright

Not surprisingly, Wright continues to offer provocative and stimulating ideas. Although *The Day The Revolution Began* is repetitive in parts, Wright's understanding of the atonement in its

context ought not to be ignored. Some, like John MacArthur (2017:online) have discredited Wright's book,<sup>3</sup> presumably without having read it; and others have embraced it, as is evident in the reviews on the back cover. Either way, the book is to be taken seriously and is to be evaluated against scripture and its historical setting. With that said, I take Wright's book as ground-breaking in atonement theology; despite criticism from others, he continues to shape his theology by Scripture, albeit creatively.

Although Wright does not engage with Rutledge and her work, he asks the same question, 'Why the cross rather than anything else?' (2016:9), and then focuses the rest of his writing on Jesus' death as the event that radically changed the world; Jesus' death had launched a revolution. He argues that the revolution the early Christians spoke about was *more* than Jesus saving us from our sin so that we can go to heaven. Rather, he died for our sin so that we could be put right and become a part of God's plan to put his world right. Wright believes that much atonement theology has been scaled down, domesticated and distorted, and he wishes to set this right and put the cross of Christ in the historical context of Israel.<sup>4</sup> Like Rutledge, and my own work,<sup>5</sup> Wright argues for a combination of two motifs, the substitutionary and *Christus Victor* motifs, joined with a third, the sacrificial imagery. He demonstrates, I think successfully, that atonement grows out of the stories we already have of Jesus' life, evident in the four Gospels. So as much as we should consult Paul's letters for atonement theology, Wright argues that we should *also* consult the Gospels. He proclaims, 'Jesus, by taking upon himself the weight of Israel's sins and thereby of the world's sins, dies under the accumulated force of evil, *so that now at last the kingdom can come in its fullness*' (p. 217).

While one might not necessarily agree with everything Wright says, his theology is challenging, and if he is right, it ought to change the way we view the cross of Christ in such a way that draws us all into the divine revolution.

## 4. Sin

### 4.1. Rutledge

Considering Pauline theology on sin, Rutledge understands Romans 7:11 as 'Sin using the Law as an instrument to deal Death to humanity' (2015:101). God, she believes, did not condemn Jesus to death, but rather Jesus was condemned by the curse of the Law, because Jesus gave himself over to the Enemy, to Sin<sup>6</sup> and to its ally, the Law. Hence, the wages of sin *is* death (Rom. 6:23 and 7:8–

**3** In his sermon, MacArthur emphatically states, 'Wright propagates a false gospel, he is a happy ambiguous heretic'. He warns that 'many young men are influenced by Wright to believe the wrong things and have absolutely no fear and terror... void of the Holy Spirit who convicts', and then proceeds to ask, 'Where are the terrified people, where is the dread' (talking of God's wrath). MacArthur made it clear that he fails to understand what Wright believes, but knows exactly what Wright does not believe (2017:online). Accordingly, MacArthur's failure to understand Wright's work, which he acknowledges himself, was made quite clear in his evaluation of the book. That 'many young men' are able to understand Wright (although with much patience) and a seasoned senior pastor and theologian is unable to grasp Wright's *complex* theology is concerning.

**4** Cf. A fascinating and charitable discussion between N.T. Wright and the Reformed New Testament Scholar, Tom Schreiner, which explores some of these issues in more depth from both perspectives can be found here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loat\\_y8SQBo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loat_y8SQBo)

**5** Cf. Falconer 2015.

**6** Rutledge capitalizes the 'Sin' when referring to Sin as a power.

11). The book argues that this was Christ's warfare, and is probably the most important reason that Christ was crucified, for '*no other mode of execution would have been commensurate with the extremity of humanity's condition under Sin*' (p. 102). As his body suffered and died under torture and execution, so 'his human nature absorbed the curse of the Law, the sentence that deals death to the human being' (p. 103; Rom. 7:11). And yet, redemption of the world was outworked through the condemnation of Jesus Christ, as the redemptive purpose in God's condemnation of the sin of his people in one man. Rutledge acknowledges individual sins, but if we are to take Scripture seriously, she says, it is more important for us to understand sin as Sin in the singular, both Sin and Death are powers, 'Sin is not so much a collection of individual misdeeds as it is an active, malevolent agency bent upon despoiling, imprisonment, and death—the utter undoing of God's purpose', proclaims Rutledge (p. 175). Sin is our cosmic enemy. And yet, it is not enough for us to simply say that we are held bondage to Sin, for the result is that we are *active, conscripted agents* of Sin (p. 179), and without God, the Christian concept of Sin has no meaning.

Sin has two aspects, Rutledge believes, (1) The crucifixion was a sacrifice for sin, and this 'Sin is a responsible guilt for which atonement must be made'; (2) All mankind is enslaved by the power of Sin (Rom. 3:9; John 8:34), Sin is an 'alien power' that must be destroyed, and one can only be liberated by a greater power. In this way Christ is said to be the Victor over Sin and Death. Sin is more than wrongdoing or grievous actions, it is an infectious illness that enslaves us in its grip, and so sin is not necessarily something we commit, but rather something that we *are in*. And yet there is no escape from these Powers, she argues, apart from the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

#### 4.2. Wright

The concept of sin is dealt with somewhat differently by Wright. For Wright, Scripture highlights God's plan to deal with sin by breaking the power of idols and so bring in the new creation into this world, the focus of which is on the people of Israel. The human problem is not just the traditional idea of sin, but for Wright it is idolatry and the corruption of vocation.<sup>7</sup> As one would expect from an advocate of the New Pauline Perspective, Wright moves away from the theology of 'Jesus takes our sin, and we take his "righteous[ness]"', and argues instead that, 'Jesus's reconciling death sets people free to take up their true vocation. The Messiah's death gives to him, and by extension to all who follow Jesus, the

<sup>7</sup> In an interview with Tom Schreiner, Wright explains that 'worshiping that which is not God is the primary sin' (Wright and Schreiner 2017:online).

vocation to be part of the ongoing divine plan, the covenant purpose for the whole world' (2016:82).

As with Rutledge, he argues from Paul, that sin is not simply breaking moral codes, although it is that too, but it is 'missing the mark' of being truly human, by worshipping idols instead of the one true God. As Wright illustrates, this plays out all too clearly in Israel's rebellion against God that eventually leads them into exile. This is true of gentiles too. The result is slavery for both mankind and creation.<sup>8</sup> By turning away from worshipping God to worshipping idols, they have rejected the vocation for which they were designed, and have thus been led into slavery to sin. Therefore, when human beings fail in their image-bearing vocation, the issue for Wright is not that they primarily face punishment, but that the Powers take control and God's plan for his people and his creation is thwarted. In this way Death is the intrinsic consequence of sin.

So, we ought to see sin, Wright believes, in the context of human vocation bearing the image of God and reflecting his wise authority to the world in praise to God. In such a milieu sin becomes the refusal to be a part of God's purposes for his creation. Sin is thus more a vocational failure than it is a moral failure.<sup>9</sup> I doubt that Wright wishes to exclude moral failure, but rather that he sees a larger more significant picture of sin in which moral failure is a part of the larger problem. Further, he argues that,

Any suggestion that "sin" does not make God angry (a frequent idea in modern thought as a reaction against the caricatures of an ill-tempered deity) needs to be treated with distain. When God looks at sin, what he sees is what a violin maker would see if the player were to use his lovely creation as a tennis racquet.<sup>10</sup> (Wright 2016:132).

We see this clearly in Israel's sins which were responsible for the exile, and therefore the atoning work of Christ and the 'forgiveness of sins' deal with the sins that caused the exile in the first place, and by extension, Wright argues, deal with all sins that alienate us from God. The 'forgiveness of sin' enables people to become human beings who fully bear the image of God as the divine vocation, now, and then completely in the coming age.

## 5. Penal Substitutionary Atonement

### 5.1. Rutledge

It is one thing to reject the caricature of Penal Substitution, as Wright does in his book, but it's quite another thing to reject it

**8** Cf. Rom. 8.

**9** In the radio interview, Schreiner disagrees explicitly with Wright at this point, saying that, 'Sin is fundamentally about relationship rather than vocational' (Wright and Schreiner 2017:online).

**10** This was a concern of Schreiner regarding Wright's book. He feels that the wrath of God is viewed negatively, in other words, Wright does not take God's wrath very seriously. However, Wright responds in the interview by saying that God is indeed wrathful against sin, but that he should not be viewed as an 'angry bullying God' (Wright and Schreiner 2017:online).

altogether. I found this most surprising in Rutledge's work, especially when she promotes Anselm's satisfaction theory. Nevertheless, she does argue for a vicarious atonement for sin, *together* with the decisive victory over Sin and Death. She argues that 'any concept of *hilasterion* in the sense of placating, appeasing, deflecting the anger of, or satisfying the wrath of' is a misconception and is inadmissible (Rutledge 2015:280). The understanding of propitiation is rejected because it sees God as the object, when in Scripture, God himself is the acting subject, says she. Further, Rutledge is concerned that if one maintains the law court motif, 'the presentation of the gospel is likely to drift into a moralistic frame of reference' (p. 320). Like Wright, she bemoans that many Christians think that Paul gives witness to an elaborate doctrine of penal substitution that is neatly worked out. Rutledge believes that this exists nowhere in Paul's thought, but affirms that his theology is that Jesus sacrificed himself as a substitute, that is 'in our place' and 'on our behalf'. The book also argues that the motif of substitution is present in Anselm, and goes as far back as the Greek and Latin Patristics.<sup>11</sup>

11 Cf. Falconer 2015.

Rutledge proclaims that substitution took a different turn after Calvin in Late Reformed Scholasticism and became *penal* substitution, a keynote in later Reformed Theology. She feels that 'preachers and teachers of penal substitution' have 'forced the biblical tapestry of motifs into a narrowly defined, schematic, rationalistic—and highly individualistic – version of the substitution motif derived in part from Anselm' (2015:488). The book discusses fourteen detailed objections to the penal substitution model; they are as follows: (1) it is 'crude', (2) it keeps bad company, (3) it is culturally conditioned, (4) it views the death as detached from the resurrection, (5), it is incoherent: an innocent person cannot take on the guilt of another, (6) it glorifies suffering and encourages masochistic behaviour, (7) it is too 'theoretical', too scholastic and abstract, (8) it depicts a vindictive God, (9) it is essentially violent, (10) it is morally objectionable, (11) it does not develop Christian character, (12) it is too individualistic,<sup>12</sup> (13) it is controlled by an emphasis on punishment, and (14) forensic imagery excludes the New Testament apocalyptic viewpoint.

12 Yet, Rutledge also writes, 'We have already stressed the communal nature of God's redeemed people over against a *hyperindividualistic* interpretation of the cross, but we must not lose sight of the individual and the summons to the conversion and discipleship of individuals. One of the most striking characteristics of Jesus as he went about his ministry was his personal address to individual men and women - calling them by name, speaking to the intimate circumstances of their lives, addressing each one in his or her singularity. Of all the motifs, it is substitution that most directly addresses the individual's involvement' (2015:529).

However, substitution, she argues, is an exchange, Christ exchanged his glory for the form of a slave, riches for poverty, his righteousness for our unrighteousness. This she believes was the way in which Christ had won the victory.

## 5.2. Wright

Wright is known as an ardent critic of the traditional penal substitutionary theory of atonement, especially after the

publication of *Pierced for our Transgressions: Rediscovering the glory of Penal Substitution*, by Jeffery, Ovey and Sach (2007). Yet, contrary to popular belief, Wright affirms the *penal* in penal substitutionary atonement,<sup>13</sup> albeit, in a fresh perspective, but one that I believe has merit.

To begin with, Wright locates penal substitution, Jesus bearing punishment in the place of his people, in biblical narrative and Patristic theology. But he argues that the Reformers gave it a ‘new spin’ in a way of rejecting the Roman Catholic theology of purgatory. Penal substitution thus became a major ‘part of the polemic against the doctrine of purgatory which lacked biblical support and had the tendency towards corruption and abuse. Further, ‘the Reformers objected strongly to the idea that the priest at the altar was sacrificing Jesus all over again, thus making the benefit of his atoning death available for all those who witnessed the event’, says Wright (2016:31). Penal substitution offered the Reformers a strong polemic against the Mass. He (2016:32) explains that,

The Reformers and their successors were thus *trying to give biblical answers to medieval questions*. They were wrestling with the questions of how the angry God of the late medieval period might be pacified, both here (through the Mass?) and hereafter (in purgatory?).

Later, in nineteenth-century Protestantism where the Mass and the doctrine of purgatory were no longer issues to contend with, penal substitution, according to Wright, found a new home in Western piety where the focus was ‘on *my* sin, *my* heavenly (that is, nonworldly) salvation, and of course *my* Saviour’ rather than on ‘God’s kingdom coming on earth as in heaven’ (Wright 2016:35).

Wright puts penal substitution primarily in the historical context of exile and to a lesser degree, the Exodus. He understands Galatians 3:13 as proclaiming ‘that the “exile” is over - because the “curse” has fallen on the Messiah himself, the single representative of Israel, and has thereby been exhausted’. He argues that one cannot get more ‘penal’ than that, especially in light of the Deuteronomic curse. In this way, Jesus’ ‘accursed death means that others are no longer under the curse’ (2016:240). The book explains that Galatians focuses on the cross in undoing the Deuteronomic ‘curse of exile’, whereby Jesus, Israel’s Messiah and representative, acts as the substitute and thus solves the problem of ‘exile’. Wright (2016:254) explains that the,

Passover-like victory over the powers is the end-of-exile dealing with sin; and the way sin is dealt with is by the appropriate *substitution* of the one who alone is the true *representative*. The

**13** MacArthur is quick to accuse Wright of rejecting substitutionary atonement, saying, ‘he (Wright) rejects the idea that Jesus is the sacrifice that God chose to die for our sins’ (2017:online). However, as Wright says, his question has everything to do with, ‘How does one put penal substitution together?’. The question is not its negation. His book, *the Day the Revolution Began*, affirms penal substitution (which is more than we see in Rutledge!). Schreiner, nevertheless, proclaims tongue-in-cheek that Wright ought to ‘write a second more balanced book’ whereby penal substitution comes through even stronger, to which Wright chuckles and seems to welcome the idea (Wright 2017:online). I think Schreiner has a point.



one bore the sin of the many. The innocent died in the place of the guilty. This only makes sense within the narrative of love, of new Exodus, of end of exile—of Jesus.

While providing exposition on relevant sections in Romans, contrary to Rutledge, Wright considers Romans 8:1–4 an explicit reference to penal substitutionary atonement. However, he believes that this does not fall under the narrative of an angry God determined to punish, as in the ‘works contract’, but rather, as part of ‘God’s vocational covenant with Israel and through Israel, the vocation that focused on the Messiah himself and then opened out at last into a genuinely human existence’ (Wright 2016:286). Instead of the typical idea of God punishing Jesus, he uses Romans 8:1-11 to show that ‘God punished *Sin in the flesh* of Jesus’ (p. 287). This offers a challenge to mainstream Christian thought.

## 6. Justification

### 6.1. Rutledge

The theology of Anselm of Canterbury’s *Cur Deus Homo* informs Rutledge’s understanding of justification. On the one hand, she advocates the concept of ‘one person being accountable for many’, and on the other hand, she argues that a just resolution of a great offence should equal or exceed its enormity, evident in the offering of Jesus Christ as a ‘supreme order of magnitude’ (2015:128). She goes on to explain that because of a perfect justice being ‘wrought in the self-offering of the Son’, no one is able to claim ‘exemption from judgement on one’s own merits, but only on the merits of the Son’ (p. 132).

Of interest is Rutledge’s use of ‘rectification’<sup>14</sup> as a synonym for ‘justification’, which she argues is a better English word because it covers all aspects. To ‘rectify’ or ‘to make right’, she argues is closer to the English word ‘righteousness’ than is the word ‘justify’. She understands the word ‘judge’ as part of the same word-group as ‘righteousness’, and that this judgement is not for destruction, but rather for purifying and removing Sin and evil. The idea parallels with her argument that ‘righteousness’ does not refer merely to human virtue and correct behaviour, but instead to God’s action in restoring righteousness and justice to Israel. Her premise is that ‘in our world, something is terribly wrong and must be put right’. Therefore, ‘the righteousness of God,<sup>15</sup> also means the justice of God, and most importantly, it means the action of God in making conditions and relationships right’, and this she believes offers a dynamic perspective of both the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rutledge 2015:144). However, Rutledge does not negate

<sup>14</sup> Bird explains that the term ‘rectification’ comes from the Apocalyptic Paul which he believes is faddish and takes the idea of justification as rectification too far (2016:online).

<sup>15</sup> In her sermon she says that, ‘Righteousness and justification mean exactly the same thing in Greek. The righteousness of God is the power of God for justification’ (2015:online).

punishment, for she clearly states that if there is to be moral order and justice, certain things cannot go unpunished, but that this justice is seen in the crucifixion of Christ, it is God's response to the injustices of the world. Justification (or rectification, as she likes to call it) is ultimately eschatological, according to Rutledge. She writes,

Pronouncing righteous (justifying/rectifying) is 'an eschatological act of the Judge at the last day which takes place proleptically in the present.' This explains how we are able to say that a person is 'made righteous' even though we can see that it isn't so. But it is so; it is eschatologically true. The verdict of 'righteous' that God pronounces at the last day is already made a fact in the present (2015:336).<sup>16</sup>

Rutledge, with a high regard for Wright and his work, is particularly disappointed that he remains antagonistic toward apocalyptic theology<sup>17</sup> (of which Rutledge seems to be an advocate), and that he 'continues to emphasize forgiveness without entertaining the larger concept of rectification' (Rutledge 2015:356). She bemoans how Wright, by re-contextualizing Jesus in the context of Second Temple Judaism, also 'de-radicalizes Paul by excluding the narrative of the captivity of the entire created order under the rule of Sin and Death'. Therefore, because he is unsympathetic to Paul's apocalyptic theology, he is unable to give 'a vastly expanded understanding of the cosmic vision of Paul which is evident in works of apocalyptic theologians (p. 367). In light of this I now turn to Wright's thoughts on justification in his book.

## 6.2. Wright

Wright, an advocate of the New Pauline Perspective,<sup>18</sup> has a very different view of justification compared to the traditional view. He takes, 'For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Cor. 5:21), as a mistranslation in many Bible translations. He believes that this 'double imputation', that is, that our sins are 'imputed' to Jesus and his righteousness is 'imputed' to us<sup>19</sup> is erroneous. This is not what Paul means, Wright argues. For Wright, justification is more about God's faithfulness to the covenant, not merely with Abraham, but ultimately through Israel and then to the whole world. It is the 'covenant declaration' which establishes in one family all who share the messianic faith, *and* 'equally, on the other hand, justification means that this believing family is declared to be *in the right*' (Wright 2016:322). Justification therefore redefines people.<sup>20</sup> According to Wright, Abraham was chosen to reverse Adam's sin, and then gave Israel the vocation of bringing light to

**16** Likewise, in the same sermon she proclaims, 'The righteousness of God is the essential gift of the age to come which awaits those who watch for Christ' (2015:online).

**17** Bird explains the Apocalyptic view of Paul as follows, 'Paul preached an evasive moment of grace that interrupts Israel's story and puts an end to religion. The problem was the cosmic tyranny of Sin, that death and religion simply cannot fix. The solution was the faithfulness of Christ, not the works of the law, the faithfulness of Christ in his death and resurrection. This is what defeats death and the powers of the present evil age' (2015:online).

**18** Here, Bird also offers a definition as follows, 'What Paul preached was the grace of the gospel against the ethnocentrism of Judaism. And there the problem is that salvation is limited to the Jewish people to the exclusion of the gentiles. The solution removing the boundaries between the Jews and gentiles so that the gentiles could be saved alongside Jews and the boundary markers were pushed away' (2015:online).

**19** Similarly, Wright laments, 'in Romans 3, the usual reading is that through this "propitiation" those who trust in what Jesus did on the cross can be declared to be "in the right." This event of "reckoning of righteousness" is called "justification" (confusingly, the English words "righteous" and "just" translate the same Greek root, *dikaïos*). The present passage is normally seen as central to this doctrine. In this usual narrative of "justification," humans start off with no moral credit, nothing to qualify them to escape hell and go to heaven; but God's action in Christ gives them the credit, the "righteousness," they need. They are therefore, "justified"' (2016:300).

**20** For a full and detailed look at Wright's theology on the New Pauline Perspective and justification, see his *magnus opus*, titled, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (2013).

the world. Both the covenant promise and the covenant purpose were meant to deal with sin. God would not remain faithful to the covenant as long as it did not deal with sin. Due to Israel's failure, Jesus became Israel's representative, the Messiah, and fulfilled God's covenant purpose. Despite Jesus being sent to his death for a crime not committed, his resurrection declared him to be 'in the right'. God declares this same verdict to those who are 'in the Messiah', 'they are freely declared to be in the right, to be members of the covenant, through the redemption which is found in the Messiah, Jesus'. Justification then takes place 'in the Messiah' (p. 323). Wright argues that this is a legal verdict with two meanings, it is covenantal *and* forensic. It is not the resurrection that causes justification, but rather it is the sign that justification took place at Calvary. Justification anticipates this verdict that would be announced on the final day, says Wright. He continues, to explain that this has been affected through Jesus, Israel's Messiah, because he had taken upon himself the vocation to which Israel had been unfaithful. Jesus' faithfulness to this vocation 'results in the covenantal declaration of "justification," in the present time, for all who believe' (p. 324).

## 7. Conclusion

This comparative book review offered brief summaries and evaluations of Fleming Rutledge's, *The Crucifixion* and N.T. Wright's, *The Day the Revolution Began*; after which I compared the following three significant themes which were common between both books, (1) Sin, (2) Penal Substitutionary Atonement and (3) Justification. Both Rutledge and Wright have written magnificent works, and will certainly make a significant contribution to scholarship. And while both are highly stimulating books, both are equally provocative and challenging.

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