

The church in her public worship uses lectionaries—at least, if she does not, she runs the grave risk of revolving, as C. S. Lewis pointed out, round the little treadmill of favorite passages, of “desert island texts,” and muzzling the terrible and wonderful things that scripture really has to say. But even in the lectionaries there are problems; because at least those that are common... today do their own fair share of muzzling, missing out crucial passages in order to keep the readings short, omitting verses that might shock modern Western sensibilities. The Bible is to be in the bloodstream of the church’s worship, but at the moment the bloodstream is looking fairly watery.¹⁶⁵⁵

E-40 On the power of stories, Wright observes:

Story authority, as Jesus knew only too well, is the authority that really works. Throw a rule book at people’s head, or offer them a list of doctrines, and they can duck or avoid it, or simply disagree and go away. Tell them a story, though, and you invite them to come into a different world; you invite them to share a world-view or better still a “God-view.” That, actually, is what the parables are all about. They offer, as all genuine Christian story-telling does, a world-view which, as someone comes into it and finds how compelling it is, quietly shatters the world-view that they were in already. Stories determine how people see themselves and how they see the world. Stories determine how they experience God, and the world, and themselves, and others. Great revolutionary movements have told stories about the past and present and future. They have invited people to see themselves in that light, and people’s lives have been changed. If that happens at a merely human level, how much more when it is God Himself, the creator, breathing through His word...

In the church and in the world, then, we have to tell the story. It is not enough to translate scripture into timeless truths. How easy it has been for theologians and preachers to translate the gospels (for instance) into something more like epistles! We must, if anything, assimilate the epistles to the gospels rather than vice versa. I would not actually recommend that, but if you were going to make a mistake that would be the direction to do it in. And as we tell the story—the story of Israel, the story of Jesus, the story of the early church—that itself is an act of worship...

We need to recapture a sense of scripture as a whole, telling and retelling stories as wholes. Only when you read Exodus as a whole (for example) do you realize the awful irony whereby the making of the golden calf¹⁶⁵⁶ is a parody of what God wanted the people to do with their gold and jewels... and only by reading Mark as a whole might you realize that, when the disciples ask to sit at Jesus’ right and left hand,¹⁶⁵⁷ they are indeed asking for something they do not understand.¹⁶⁵⁸

E-41 About this reductive approach to scriptural understanding, Wright laments:

We have, again and again, allowed ourselves to say—I’ve heard myself say it, over and over again—“What Paul is really getting at here is...” “What Jesus was really meaning in this passage...”—and then, what has happened is a translation of something which is beautiful, and fragile, and unique, into something which is commonplace and boring, and every other Christian in the pew has heard it several sermons before. I am reminded of that amazing line in Schaffer’s play *Amadeus* where Salieri sees on stage Mozart’s *Figaro*, and he says, “He has taken ordinary people—chambermaids and servants and barbers—and he has made them gods and heroes.” And then Salieri remembers his own operas and he says, “I have taken gods and heroes—and I have made them ordinary.” God forgive us that we have taken the Bible and have made it ordinary—that we have cut it down to our size. We have reduced it, so that whatever text we preach on it will say basically the same things.¹⁶⁵⁹

Teaching the scriptures in this trivializing manner performs what Neusner has called “a negative miracle”: it takes a subject, namely religion, which is “rich in life, and [makes] it dull.”¹⁶⁶⁰

E-42 Halpern and Wesson note that “to many physicists this explanation doesn’t seem physical enough, given that nobody can really travel in imaginary time,” and describe alternative suggestions for circumventing the necessity for an initial singularity.¹⁶⁶¹

Note that, concluding the impossibility of a complete description of the universe, Hawking has since

1655 *Ibid.*

1656 Exodus 32:1-4.

1657 Mark 10:37-40.

1658 N. T. Wright, *Authoritative*.

1659 *Ibid.*

1660 J. Neusner, *Vocation*, p. 118, cited in A. B. McCollum, *Re-visioning*, p. 178.

1661 P. Halpern, *et al.*, *Brave*, pp. 175-176.