

Heath Street

BAPTIST CHURCH



Book Review

Paul

Paul: A Biography by Tom Wright

Ewan put this book into my hands. I couldn't put it down. Honestly. I recommend you get a copy and read it. Here's why: It will open up the Bible to you...the vast world of Scripture, the Holy Lands, the story of Israel, Jews, Gentiles, One God, Abraham, Isaac, David and Jesus, Messiah and Lord...all brought to you through the life of Paul, but brought to life through Paul's greatest interpreter, Tom Wright.

I never thought I needed an interpreter of the Scripture. I thought of myself as Philip, not the eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). But Wright changed my mind. Truth be told, I'm the Ethiopian: "...how can we understand, without someone to guide us?" Just as the Ethiopian eunuch discovered, reading the Bible is difficult, and understanding what we are reading -- all the stories and pronouncements -- is daunting. We need a guide AND an interpreter.

Tom Wright is both.

In his book, Paul: A Biography, Wright literally brings Paul to life. It's no exaggeration to say that we -- the Church, the Body of Believers, the Community of Jesus-followers -- owe much of our faith and belief to Paul, his incredible energy, his experience (his "testimony"), his subsequent impulse to travel and his infectious zeal for Jesus, all revealed through his letters totaling just 80 pages or so in the standard Bible. To interpret those pages, Wright puts us into the mind of Paul, a Jew, the Jewish world, the culture of the Greeks and Romans, and all of the dynamics caused by being a Jesus-follower here on earth, ruled by our worldly powers and plagued by our earthly concerns. In short, Wright provides us with a proper "context" to understand what happened with the arrival and life of the long-awaited Jewish Messiah and the execution, resurrection and departure of a King-for-us-all.

For example, Wright puts us in a 1st-century mindset to tell us that

Jesus-followers of that era were not preoccupied with going to heaven or hell -- that was a medieval construction. They were preoccupied with the heaven-and-earth construct, how God moves and reveals Himself in the real world. The Messiah who was to transform the earth in a "new creation" would transform our minds and bodies too. Religion to the Jesus-followers of the 1st century was not about belief but community, the "body of believers". Religion, Wright explains, comes from the Latin word "religio" meaning "to bind". And Paul wanted to bind people not to the Jewish practices of sacrifice, eating rituals, circumcision, and restrictions on sex, but to "ideas" such as Jesus-as-Messiah, Jesus-as-Lord, One God, his Son, and the Spirit. Yes, argues Wright, Paul wants to bind Jews to Jesus as an extension of Jewishness, and bind Jesus-as-Messiah-and-Lord to the wider world of Greeks, Romans and ALL the gentiles (and me!)

According to Wright, the issue in the 1st century is not sin but idolatry. If you were Jewish, you had the One God. The barrier between God and his creation in the larger world of Greeks and Romans, however, was the many-gods barrier. The sin-as-barrier comes later, when Paul exhorts his listeners and readers, Jews and Gentiles alike, to be God's agents on earth, to reflect

God's wisdom and order INTO the world and to reflect the praises of creation BACK to God.

So according to Wright, Paul's story is a rescue story. Paul is saying that God will put the whole world right IF people -- their heads and hearts -- can be put right. This is what Paul is determined to do.

Wright paints a picture of Paul as a pivot, bringing us a Messiah not just for the Jewish, but for the world. Unlike other Jesus-followers, Paul is a pivot because he is Jewish AND Roman. He is a loyal Jew and a subject of Caesar, endowed with certain rights as a citizen of Rome, chief among them being the right to be heard in his own defense. Jesus, the hope and King of Israel, is part of the One God central to Jewishness that Rome allowed despite non-Jewish Romans having to pledge allegiance to Caesar only. It is through this tiny pivot-point of Jewish-AND-Roman that Jesus emerges from the Jewish world to the world at large.

Sure, Paul was a troublemaker, says Wright. Pre-Damascus road, he certainly was making trouble for Jesus-followers. But Paul was right without being righteous, Wright explains. Yes, in the synagogues he was beaten, a crazy Jew who was hard

to take. Nevertheless, his narrative is so powerful, connecting Jesus-as-promised-Messiah to God-made-visible, the Old Testament to the New, the covenant to the new covenant, that God WILL appear to God HAS appeared, that after abandoning the Temple in the time of the Babylonian exile, God has come back in the person of his Son. Crazy? Yes. But blessed with a quick mind and being a talker, Paul had the ability to persuade. Sure, he was accused of getting his gospel second-hand (versus the first-hand accounts of Peter, James and the rest). But Paul was given his gospel directly, Wright argues, on the road to Damascus where Jesus revealed himself to Paul, on the roads first down to Sinai (for credibility where earlier God met Moses), then over to Jerusalem (where Peter, James and the other powers-that-be were headquartered) and up to Antioch, west into Greece and Europe, back to Jerusalem and west again to Rome and Spain(?), accompanied by the Spirit.

Wright starts each chapter with a map, and we readers are allowed to tag along. And along the way, Wright explains what is going on in Paul's mind and world, the whys

and the wherefores, the arguments and squabbles, the rehearsals and rehashing of the One God-Jesus as Messiah and Lord talking points linking Paul's own experience with the larger narrative of Jewish belief that God would put the whole world right.

Paul preaches and persuades: It's not heaven where God dwells, it's Heaven-and-Earth in which God wants to dwell.

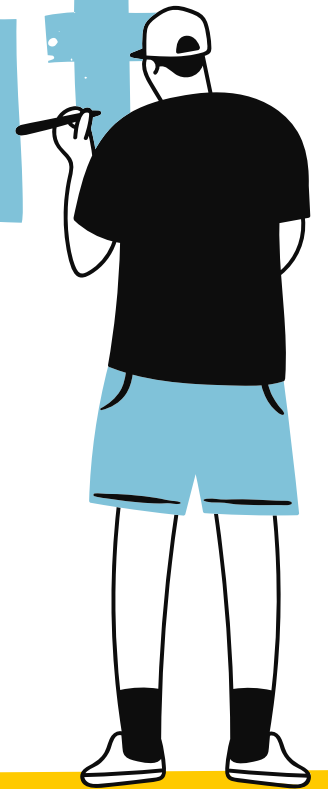
The Bible narrative, according to Paul (and Paul's greatest interpreter Tom Wright), isn't to be read to know WHAT to think, but HOW to think clearly, scripturally and prayerfully. Knowing HOW to think, we can work out for ourselves the 1001 issues, circumstances and problems that beset our earthly lives. Paul shows us that God is at work, working through people, binding us to a better world -- a new creation -- of heaven-and-earth made possible through the Messiah and the Spirit.

Paul opened our eyes, and Tom Wright opened mine!

Don Hughston

Don't

Quit



Baptist Pastor Who Stood Against Nazi Ideology Honoured

From The Baptist Times
15 October 2024

Arnold Köster was a German-born Baptist pastor and one of the most prominent Christian voices of resistance to National Socialism in the German-speaking world in the 1930s and 40s.

Köster was pastor of Mollardgasse Baptist Church in Vienna from 1929–1960, the only independent Baptist congregation in Austria at the time. His statements on National Socialism can be traced back to 1930 in articles in Baptist magazines and in around 500 sermons held during Austria's Nazi era.

Preaching twice on Sundays and delivering a lecture each Thursday, Köster has been described as 'one of the sharpest public, continuous critics of the Nazis in the Greater German Reich', by Franz Graf-Stuhlhofer, church historian and Baptist theologian. There were very few such critics in the free church environment,

says Andrea Strübind, another Baptist theologian and historian.

Speaking out against the emphasis on racial differences, Köster also offered refuge to those persecuted.

Mollardgasse is one of Austria's oldest Baptist churches, and recently marked 100 years in its current building.

As part of the celebrations the church had been approached by Vienna city council about putting up a plaque to honour Köster's memory.

Ewan King, minister of Heath Street Baptist Church in London, participated in various activities surrounding the unveiling of a plaque.

He had been invited by Dietrich Fischer-Dörl ('Didi'), the current pastor at Mollardgasse, as pre-pandemic the churches had stuck up an intercultural mission collaboration.

Young Viennese Baptists have come over to London to help with the church's Easter arts missions, while Heath Street members have been to Vienna to plan, to preach and to perform music. Ewan had also put Didi in touch with Paul Fiddes a few years ago, which resulted in Paul presenting a lecture there on Brahms and the Baptists.

The weekend of the celebrations and plaque unveiling saw constant torrential rain and high winds.

'We unveiled the plaque in a blustery squall,' Ewan said. 'But there was coffee and cake, and excellent addresses from religious and civic leaders.'

'Definitely what left the deepest impression was a short address given by the Lutheran Bishop of Vienna, Michael Chalupka (see text below). He spoke about Lutheran complicity, Köster's resistance, the failure of the church, and the faithfulness of God.'

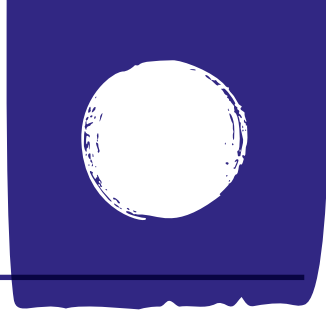
'But in highlighting the failure of the church, he also stated Protestantism still exists in Austria because of people (like Köster) who did preach the gospel in this time.'

Bishop Michael has a regular column in one of the big tabloids, the Kronen, and used it to write about Köster the next day, Ewan continued.



'I think it's fair to say that in Germany and Austria that dark period is generally on people's minds more than usual, with the rise of the Far Right both there, and all across Europe.'

Bishop Michael Chalupka's text



Dear sisters and brothers, including the district councillor, your excellency and your magnificency, I would like to begin with a confession that has made me very thoughtful. Before I received the invitation to the unveiling of this memorial plaque, the name of Pastor Köster said nothing to me whatsoever.

That might be my fault, my ignorance, I reflected, and I looked in the most recent standard work on the history of Austrian protestantism in the time of National Socialism, 600 pages from Leonard Jung were searched: Arnold Köster's name does not appear.

I find this fascinating and regrettable because it belongs to the story of the Lutheran Evangelical church in Austria, that in this period of history, the church fell into error. Contrary to what is said, people [in the church] had no embarrassment about saying they were Nazi party members. Two thirds of the men who were priests (there were no women priests at this time) identified themselves in 1939 as having been illegal Nazis [i.e. before the Anschluss].

This wasn't quite true: In truth it was only half, because in 1939 people were keen to say that they were Nazi party members. But the Lutheran church fell into error in this period.

As Lutherans in Austria, we are always proud to repeat that 'God protected us in the time of 'secret Protestantism', during the Counter Reformation'. I think we could speak of protection much more justly, in so far as this church was raised up again after the Second World War, and did not sink into the ground in shame. This is why we try to 'work through' this period of history, and this is why I am all the more sorry that Arnold Köster does not appear in this standard work.

There is a book about the Lutheran priests and pastors who were murdered in Mauthausen (Mauthausen concentration camp), and there we find one who has a

relation to Austria. That is Sigmund Warger, a Hungarian Reformed theologian, who did what Arnold Köster did here, and in the Reformed City church, like Arnold Köster here, certainly had Gestapo agents present, who like Mrs Hoffman, wrote down what the preacher said, though for different reasons.

There one of the Gestapo agents notified saying, 'Put a stop to this preaching of yours'. Sigmund Warger said, 'I will take no orders from you, this is my pulpit': that was his death sentence.

That Arnold Köster was able to preach here, and distance himself so clearly, and proclaim the gospel so clearly, shows me two things.

I learnt one of them from my mother, who is 94 and lives happily, which is to say that she lived through that time. She already told me as a child, 'Don't let anyone tell you we didn't know. We knew everything'. She was 15 then, at the end of the world war. That is, people knew about it, and it was possible for them to take a stance.

That Arnold Köster was not imprisoned may be a matter of chance. But it also shows it was possible to speak, and to speak publicly. We have heard that Köster did not speak into thin air: there were hundreds of people present; it was written down, it was publicised.

I have asked myself, why does Protestantism still exist in Austria at all? I think it is also thanks to those people who did preach the gospel in this time. The German theologian Helmut Gollwitzer has said that the misuse of gospel does not go unpunished. He said this with respect to apartheid in South Africa. That is, one cannot try to bend the gospel: it will prevail.

For that reason I believe it was so important that in Mauthausen people proclaimed the gospel, even though it was forbidden. Mauthausen was the exception amongst all the concentration camps of the German Reich (we Austrians might reflect on why this was) in that it was the camp where all religious practice was most strictly forbidden. That is to say that if one was caught praying, the punishment was death. Yet people prayed there, they proclaimed there: but also here, that is, this place, is a place where the life of the

gospel was preserved.

And a last thought that is also suitable for your centenary celebration. I believe that it is for this reason that the dear God founded the denominations. Then he did not have to give us the treasure of the gospel all in one treasure chest, with which the people could do whatever they willed. Instead, somewhere there will always be a denomination where the gospel is preserved loud and pure – only (don't be disappointed) it won't always be the Baptists.

We have a duty as watchmen to one another. But for this reason I am happy that that duty was carried out here, I thank you and I wish for you that you would continue to carry out this duty for the next 100 years, and for my own church I wish that it would never again fall into error.

Thank you.

Are We A small Church?

It has been hard not to worry, or even feel a bit embarrassed, when we have visiting worship leaders over the summer holiday and see them facing a tiny congregation and remember that it was much the same when they came to help out last summer. Will they think it is the same every Sunday? Can we convey the breadth of what goes on in Heath Street Baptist Church in an average non-holiday week and the considerable numbers that come through the doors one

way or another? Should we mind that some Sundays we are barely in double figures while on others we are relatively crammed in? How much do the numbers matter? How can we stop ourselves occasionally panicking that too few people take too much of the responsibility for the building and what goes on in it? At a recent meeting, the Deacons talked about guidance offered by the London Baptist Association to “small churches”* and why it doesn't feel the



right term for us.

Here's the gist of our thoughts so far on the kind of church we are: We do not easily fit the “small church” category, which usually means a church with a stable, small, cohesive congregation, rather than the fluctuating, multi-faceted range of people and projects at Heath Street. We need to learn to value what we have, find ways in which all the elements can be encouraged, and new ideas fostered, and build commitment to the whole as well as the parts. In planning next steps for maintaining our work and developing new mission we should deepen our understanding of what we have. There is an issue of viability – we need a critical mass of people committed to the core and the building – but we are (and may always be?) a community that is geographically scattered, diverse in our faith, with most people deeply engaged in other commitments (work, study, projects, their local geographic community, etc).

If you disagree with our logic, please say what you think.

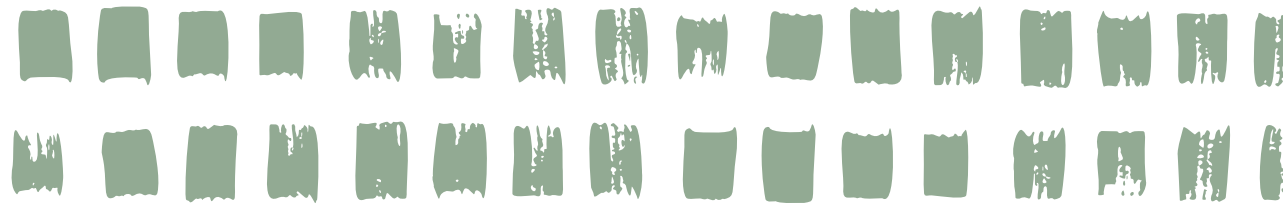
But if we are at all right in our assessment, we shall need the input of the many people connected with Heath Street to see how we put into practice the idea of deepening our engagement with the resources within our community. We will be hoping to think and discuss and pray about this at a future church meeting, where everyone who is part of the community is welcome to bring their perspective. But meanwhile, will you help us get the conversation started?

Gaynor Humphreys

[* Small Church Connexion (SCC) was formed in 2003 as an initiative by the London Baptists (LB) to network London Baptist churches with fewer than 40 people.]



Taizé services



We have a very exciting new ministry that has sprung from a friendship with the Revd Dr Catriona Laing, the (relatively new) Vicar at Emmanuel Church, West Hampstead. We are doing monthly evening Taizé services, alternating hosting duties between Heath St and Emmanuel. Revd Laing (who we call Trin!) leads the worship, and our own Ewan King leads the music. These services have a focus of young people, and it's been young people (and not just the young Kings!) playing the instruments that accompany those gathered as they sing those wonderful Taizé chants.

If you're wondering what Taizé is, well I'll try my best to explain. Taizé is an ecumenical community run by an unusual holy order comprised of both Catholics and Protestants. This brotherhood have a ministry to the young, and thousands of young people aged 15-30 travel to France every year and stay with the community for a week of prayer, reflection, worship and bible study.

I take the time to explain this





because, as well as following Taizé liturgies here in London, we have also organised a trip to the Taizé community itself over the October half term. I took Frida from here at Heath Street and also Jessica, the young Sunday School teacher from Highgate URC up on Pond Sq. A full report will follow in the next newsletter. We hope this trip will be the vanguard to future visits to the community, so if you or someone you know is between 15 and 35 and would like to join, then do get in touch!

secretary@heathstreet.org

Just for fun, we did some pizza making before the most recent Taizé service at Heath Street! It was great fun, as you can see from our pictures. If you're wondering what pizza making is, well I'll try my best to explain. Pizza making is when you try to see how much of your favourite ingredients you can fit on a pizza base. And don't worry if your eyes have been bigger than your stomach, for the good folks at the Contact Club will be along later to help eat the pizzas you couldn't quite manage!

Wilf Merttens
Children's Worker



From the Treasurer



If you are someone who buys online, whether a lot or only occasionally, there is a lovely, simple way of getting a little extra money to Heath Street Baptist Church, without costing you anything. It doesn't even take much time. Easyfundraising channels a small extra sum, usually a percentage of what you spend, from the retailer when you pay for an order, into an account for the Church. We only have a few people signed up at the moment, but even so we have received almost £150 from the scheme.

The advert above from Easyfundraising emphasises grocery shopping, with Tesco, Morrisons, ASDA, Waitrose, Sainsbury's, Iceland and Ocado among the shops included. It would be marvellous to have some supporters who are regular online food buyers! But any purchases can qualify, and a lot of household name retailers are in the scheme (7000 in all).

Registration is easy and there's no cost to you anywhere in the process. Log on to www.easyfundraising.org.uk and sign up by saying you want to support a cause; type in Heath Street Baptist Church and our little logo will come up. Click that, add your name and a password and that's about it. If you agree to having a donation reminder, the easyfundraising logo will pop up when you go into a retailer's website to remind you to ask for the donation.

You can opt to be anonymous if you want, but it would be nice to know who is supporting us this way – I get a list every month or so telling me how many supporters we have and what each one has earned for us and it is a shame to have too many "anons". It seems to be a painless way of getting us a little extra towards our horrible gas and electricity bills, or to pay for the coffee and tea after a Sunday service.

Please sign up!

Gaynor Humphreys



READINGS & PRAYERS

NOVEMBER 17-23

DANIEL 12.1-3

17th Theresa Thom
18th Juno Lee
19th Maral Agin
20th Edward Humphreys
21st Nathalia Bell
22nd Elya Ghasempour
23rd Sarah Harper

NOVEMBER 24-30

DANIEL 7.9-14

24th Grace Jiang
25th Julie Benoit
26th Wilf Merttens
27th Jen Finamore
28th Thaddeus King
29th Mysie Johnson
30th Leila Ranjbar

DECEMBER 1-7

JEREMIAH 33.14-16

1st Laura Somers
2nd Genna Naccache
3rd Robin Thorne
4th Coco Ellenbogen
5th John-Henry Baker
6th Joachim King
7th Esme Baker

DECEMBER 8-14

MALACHI 3.1-4

8th Ali Ghasempour
9th Phoebe Jiang
10th Gaynor Humphreys
11th Dusol Lee
12th for all who attend Oldtime Nursery
13th Susan Le Quesne
14th Elisa Ghasempour

DECEMBER 15-21

ZEPHANIAH 3.14-20

15th Birgit Leuppert
16th Evelyn Baker
17th Babak Agin
18th Frida King
19th Lydia Baker
20th Fiona Ranford
21st HK

DECEMBER 22-28

MICAH 5.2-5

22nd Zahra Safaryazdi
23rd Otilie Johnson
24th Annie Fang
25th Anselm King
26th Emad Eisapour
27th Ewan King
28th Hyun Ju Lee

DECEMBER 29-JANUARY 4

I SAMUEL 2.18-26

29th Beryl Dowsett
30th Tom Somers
31st Gabrielle Falardeau
1st Jan Rhona MacEachen
2nd for our community choir
3rd Isabel Somers
4th Cole Ellenbogen



Love Wisdom Grace & Hope

WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

SUNDAYS

11 am DIVINE WORSHIP
Including our Children's Sunday Club
stories, crafts, drama and play for all ages

Live stream also available on request by
e-mailing johnhenry@heathstreet.org at least
24 hours in advance

6 pm SUNDAY SUNDOWN CONCERT SERIES
7 pm CONTACT CLUB

MONDAYS

5 pm STORYMAKERS CLUB
An after-school club aimed at children between the
ages of 7 and 13.

TUESDAYS

9:30AM OLDTIME NURSERY
Introducing old melodies and traditional
stories to a new generation of children
5 pm STORYMAKERS CLUB

THURSDAYS

10:30AM OLDTIME NURSERY

7:30PM HEATH STREET CHOIR REHEARSALS



Please see the church website for updates
www.heathstreet.org

For requests regarding church membership,
Baptism or opportunities for Christian ministry in the church,
please contact the minister.

Copy for the next Newsletter

should reach Eleanor Patterson (eleanorlaise@gmail.com)
not later than Wednesday 18th December.

Church Officers

Gaynor Humphreys (Treasurer)
Wilf Merttens (Church Secretary)
Annie Fang (Deacon)
Sarah Harper (Deacon)

Music Outreach Coordinator

John-Henry Baker
johnhenry@heathstreet.org

Minister Ewan King

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