



BOOK REVIEW

A Review of *The Great Story and the Great Commission: Participating in the Biblical Drama of Mission*

David Quackenbos¹

¹ Southwest Baptist University

<https://doi.org/10.64830/001c.144255>

Journal of Language, Culture, and Religion

Vol. 6, Issue 1, 2025

Wright, Christopher J. H. 2023. *The Great Story and the Great Commission: Participating in the Biblical Drama of Mission*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. xiv + 156 pp.

Christopher J. H. Wright's *The Great Story and the Great Commission* is a superb example of "the right person for the right job." This book is part of the Acadia Studies in Bible and Theology series, where esteemed scholars "present their findings in a way that students, pastors, laity, and nonspecialists will find accessible and rewarding" (p. ii). This is exactly what Wright achieves. Scholars are aware of Wright's significant contributions to Old Testament and whole-Bible theology, but here he concisely yet substantively articulates his missional hermeneutic to a lay audience. The book is structured with a Preface, Introduction, and nine chapters. Wright's central thesis is "the Bible clearly reveals the God who drives the whole story of the universe forward with a sense of divine purpose and ultimate destiny, who also calls into existence a people who share in that divine mission, a people with an identity and role within the plan of God" (p. xi).

In Chapter One ("A Missional Hermeneutic of Scripture"), Wright defines *missional hermeneutic* as interpreting the Bible from three interwoven perspectives. First, the canon is the *record* of God's mission—what transpired in God's salvation history. Second, that record is itself a *product* of God's mission in action—God's people applied themselves to carrying out God's mission. Third, the canon is a *tool* of God's mission—it equips believers of all eras to participate in God's mission.

In Chapter Two ("The Great Story as a Drama in Seven Acts"), Wright begins to demonstrate the validity of the missional hermeneutic by explaining "The Great Story," i.e., God's missional plan spanning all of history, as a drama in seven acts: creation, rebellion, promise, Christ, mission, judgment, and new creation. This story stresses, yet goes beyond the metanarrative of Scripture, thus reinforcing the three aspects of the hermeneutic posited in Chapter One. Wright provides several astute observations, among them the importance of a robust theology of creation as a foundation for mission (p. 18), and the "downward" trajectory of God's actions in establishing the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21 (p. 34).

In Chapter 3 (“What Does the Great Story Do?”), Wright argues that a missional hermeneutic invites God’s people to find themselves in *each act* of the Great Story. Wright states, “theologically and spiritually, *we inhabit the whole story*, while chronologically we live and serve within act 5” (p. 40). For example, we “inhabit” act 3 (promise) in that, like Old Testament Israel, we are called to remain faithful to God and to be a light to all nations.

Having discussed the key components of the Great Story, Wright moves to its application, The Great Commission. In Chapter Four (“The Great Commission and the Five Marks of Mission”) he outlines two vitally important ideas essential to his thesis. First, the Great Commission as stated in Matthew 28:18–20 reflects all seven acts of the Great Story. Jesus’s proclamation that “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (v. 18) legitimizes all mission enterprises. Second, understanding *mission* as emanating from the entire biblical metanarrative and not merely commanded in the last three verses of Matthew properly orients our focus. That is, it is not *our* mission, but rather we participate in *God’s* mission.

In the latter part of Chapter Four, Wright sets the stage for the rest of the book by adopting the “Five Marks of Mission” as produced by the Anglican Consultative Council in 1984. He adequately shows how these five characteristics—evangelism, teaching, justice, compassion, and creation responsibility—align with his missional hermeneutic. Wright organizes these five marks into three “focal points of mission”: Building the Church, Serving Society, and Ruling Over and Caring for Creation.

In Chapters Five through Eight, Wright elaborates on these three focal points. In Chapter Five (“Building the Church through Evangelism and Teaching”), he demonstrates the significance of the Greek *euangelion* as used throughout Scripture (LXX and NT) as a basis for a whole-Bible understanding of the church’s call to evangelism. He also forcefully argues that teaching is not subsidiary to evangelism, but rather a co-equal aspect of the Great Commission.

In Chapter Six (“Serving Society through Compassion and Justice”), Wright maintains that compassion and justice are “plainly implied” as components of God’s mission by Jesus’s statement, “teaching them to observe *all that I have commanded you*” (Matt. 28:20, italics his) (p. 87). “All” includes instances in the Bible where God commanded his people to act with compassion and justice towards others.

In Chapters Seven and Eight (“The Goodness and Glory of Creation” and “The Goal of Creation”), Wright addresses his third focal point from two angles. First, he establishes that Jesus’s declaration, “All authority...has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18) is the justifiable basis for the inclusion of “creation care” as part of God’s mission as we live our lives here on earth. Second, he discusses creation care from an eschatological angle, arguing that

our participation in God-ordained creation care *now* anticipates our *future, ultimately-fulfilled* role. Wright's extended explanation of Jesus's death as redeeming all creation (pp. 128–133) is one of the highlights of the book.

Wright closes in Chapter 9 ("The Great Story, the Great Commission, and the Church's Mission") by issuing a three-part exhortation: God's mission is for the whole church, the whole church's mission includes every member, and every member's mission includes the whole of life.

Scholars who are familiar with Wright's previous works, especially *The Mission of God* (IVP Academic, 2006), will not find anything particularly new or different here in terms of his hermeneutical approach, but that is precisely the point. The importance of this book lies in its accessibility. Wright has brought to bear his considerable acumen to enunciate his approach in a clear and understandable way for nonspecialists. His insights are keen. His examples are illustrative and memorable. He employs diagrams to convey his points simply. He cogently explains *metanarrative* to an audience that might not be familiar with the idea. And, it is worth adding, he models humility (see p. 79fn). This book is ideal for a church study or for Bible students taking their initial foray into biblical theology.

The only minor quibble I would raise in this otherwise masterful study is that the structure of Wright's examination of the "five marks of mission" is a bit cumbersome. He starts with five "marks," which he condenses to three "focal points," which he then analyzes in four chapters. Wright takes care to recap as he progresses through each chapter, but a more streamlined organization would have obviated the need for this, and lessened the possibility of confusing a lay audience. This observation, however, does not constitute a major distraction from the overall flow of the book.

In *The Great Story and the Great Commission*, Christopher J. H. Wright has produced a succinct yet substantive exposition of the missional hermeneutic, and in doing so has made a valuable contribution to both the church and the academy. This book will no doubt prompt many believers toward further study of whole-Bible theology and increasingly to partake of the "solid food" of God's word (1 Cor 3:2; Heb 5:14).

David A. Quackenbos

Southwest Baptist University, Bolivar, MO

Published: October 17, 2025 CDT.



This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CCBY-4.0). View this license's legal deed at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0> and legal code at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode> for more information.