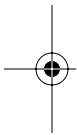


PREFACE

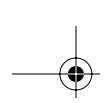


After working for some years on a major book on the resurrection, I resolved at the start of 2003 that I would turn my attention to the meaning of Jesus' crucifixion. But as soon as I began to think how I might approach the subject, I realized that there was something else I had to do first. When Christians talk about what Jesus accomplished in his death, they usually say something about his cross as the answer to, or the result of, evil. But what is evil?



The same question presented itself to me for a very different reason. Between September 11, 2001, when terrorists flew airplanes into the Twin Towers in New York and into the Pentagon in Washington, and my reflecting on the cross and the problem of evil in early 2003, the topic of "evil" had suddenly become hot. American President George W. Bush had declared that there was an "axis of evil" which had to be dealt with. British Prime Minister Tony Blair announced that the task of the politician was to rid the world of evil. Commentators on the left and on the right expressed



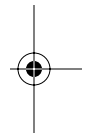
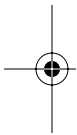


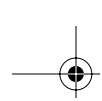
doubts about both the analysis and the solution—doubts which the war in Iraq and its aftermath have amply justified.

I turned my reflections into five lectures which I delivered at Westminster Abbey, where I was then working, in the first half of 2003. I then attempted to summarize my thesis in a television program made by Blakeway Productions and first screened on Channel 4 in the U.K. on Easter Day 2005; copies of this film are available from Blakeway (www.blakeway.co.uk). I am very grateful to David Wilson, the producer, and to Denys Blakeway himself, for understanding what I was trying to say and enabling me to communicate it in a very different medium. Those who saw the program and were puzzled by what I did not manage to say in the 49 minutes available to me may perhaps be mollified by the fuller version offered in the present book.

Having said that, I do not pretend for a moment that I have here provided a full or even a balanced treatment either of the problem of evil or, more especially, of the meaning of Jesus' crucifixion. The central chapter of this book approaches Jesus' death from one angle which I believe to be deeply fruitful, but I am well aware that a more complete account of the meaning and saving effect of Jesus' death would need to raise and answer far more questions than I have even mentioned, and to deal with biblical passages and theological and philosophical ideas for which there is no space here. I hope, however, that this will at least point in the direction of further work.

In the first lecture—now the first chapter—I used as one of my controlling images the biblical picture of the wild, untamed sea. I





Preface

11

was then all the more horrified when, on December 26, 2004, a tsunami ripped across the Indian Ocean, smashing people and communities to pieces. Then, like the rest of the world, I had an awful sense of déjà vu when Hurricane Katrina drowned New Orleans and a large section of the American Gulf Coast in August 2005. When I asked myself to whom the present book should be dedicated, I could think of no better answer than to honor the memory of those who died in those two disasters and the subsequent earthquake in Pakistan and Kashmir, along with the victims of September 11, 2001. They are a reminder that “the problem of evil” is not something we will “solve” in the present world, and that our primary task is not so much to give answers to impossible philosophical questions as to bring signs of God’s new world to birth on the basis of Jesus’ death and in the power of his Spirit, even in the midst of “the present evil age.”

N. T. Wright
Easter 2006

