

# Latimer Trust

## Monthly Reading List – December 2018

This is a summary of recent books read by Martin Davie, compiling his evaluations and the commendations of others.

In this edition:

Author	Title	Martin's opinion
Michael Allen	<i>Grounded in Heaven: Recentering Christian Hope and Life on God</i>	This is an academically rigorous study and as such, will prove an invaluable resource for teachers and students and for ministers who need material on the heavenly calling of Christians.
David Bennett	<i>A War of Loves: The Unexpected Story of a Gay Activist Discovering Jesus</i>	This is a profound and moving book that describes how encountering the gospel changed Bennett's life for ever. It is a book that orthodox straight Christians need to read to understand better what it is like to be Christian and same-sex attracted.
Michael Goheen	<i>The Church and Its Vocation: Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology</i>	This book is a stimulating study of an important topic. It will be of interest to anyone wanting an introduction to the thought of Lesslie Newbigin, or be pushed to think more deeply about the nature of the Church and its place in the purposes of God.
Lydia McGrew	<i>Hidden in Plain View: Undesigned Coincidences in the Gospels and Acts</i>	This is a fascinating and accessible study that adds another useful weapon to the Christian apologetic arsenal. This is a book which Christians should have to hand.
Peter Orr	<i>Exalted Above The Heavens: The Risen And Ascended Christ</i>	This book offers a comprehensive survey of what the NT has to say about who Christ now is and what Christ now does. It is a quite detailed study so it will not be suitable for everyone, but it provides an excellent resource for theological teachers, students and ministers.
Tim Patrick	<i>A Handbook to the Source Documents of the English Reformation (Anglican Foundations)</i>	This is an extremely helpful handbook that provides those beginning the study of the Reformation formularies the key things that they initially need to know and the most important sources of information they should look at if they want to know more.
Jackie Hill Perry	<i>Gay Girl, Good God: The Story of Who I Was, and Who God Has Always Been</i>	This book is a hugely powerful testimony to the grace of God. A book worth reading, meditating on and passing on to others.
Walter Schumm	<i>Same-Sex Parenting Research: A Critical Assessment</i>	This book is an important contribution to the debate about same-sex parenting and it deserves to be widely read. It takes a long, hard look at the research that is cited in support of same-sex parenting and finds it wanting.
Christopher Watkin	<i>Thinking Through Creation: Genesis 1 and 2 as Tools of Cultural Critique</i>	This would be a good book to give to a serious enquirer wanting to understand the Christian worldview. It would also make an excellent text for a college course on this subject or for a house group interested in a serious intellectual engagement with the topics.
Peter J Williams	<i>Can We Trust the Gospels?</i>	A comprehensive, scholarly and yet readable defence of the Gospels' trustworthiness. An excellent book that can be highly recommended.

Michael Allen, *Grounded in Heaven: Recentering Christian Hope and Life on God*, Eerdmans, ISBN 978-0-80287-453-5, £14.30.

#### Overview:

Michael Allen is the Professor of Systematic Theology and Academic Dean at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando in the United States. In his new book he seeks to challenge the idea that has become widespread in recent years that turning our eyes upwards towards heaven means taking our eyes off the needs of others and the work that God wants us to do in this world. Like C S Lewis, he argues instead that it is those who have their eyes fixed on their heavenly destiny who are best equipped to serve God and their neighbours in this world.

In his view, eschatology, our understanding of the future, and ethics, our understanding of how we should behave, necessarily belong together, and both need re-orientation towards God. In order to provide such a re-orientation, Allen retrieves the traditional Christian concept of the beatific vision ('seeing God as he is' 1 John 3:2) and shows how this concept helps to bring Christ back into the heart of both our theology and the way we live our lives here on earth.

The hope of the beatific vision has traditionally been seen as a Catholic emphasis, but Allen approaches it from the perspective of the Reformed tradition. He looks back to the classical tradition of ethics found in philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, who insisted that ethics was dependent upon understanding the ultimate end for which human beings are made, and explores the way in which this classical tradition was both followed and re-interpreted in the light of the biblical revelation by John Calvin and other Reformed theologians. On this basis *Grounded in Heaven* offers a distinctly Protestant account of the Christian calling to be heavenly-minded and to deny one's self for the sake of God's coming kingdom.

#### Martin's opinion:

It is often said that that people can be 'too heavenly minded to be any earthly use'. Allen's book seeks to show why this saying is a complete distortion of the truth. It is an academically rigorous study and as such is not designed for the average Christian in the pew. However, it will prove an invaluable resource for teachers and students of Christian ethics and spirituality and for ministers who need material on the heavenly calling of Christians which they can mine for their congregations.

#### Commendations:

J Todd Billings writes:

Allen articulates a richly theocentric account of heaven that affixes our affections and actions to the proper end of creation and redemption: the Triune God made known to us in Jesus Christ...This lively book is a conversation changer.

David Bennett, *A War of Loves: The Unexpected Story of a Gay Activist Discovering Jesus*, Zondervan, ISBN 978-0-31053-810-3, £12.99 (e and audio book editions also available).

#### Overview:

This year the autobiographical best-sellers *Undivided* by Vicky Beeching and *Just Love: A Journey of Self-acceptance* by Jayne Ozanne have given weight to the argument of the LGBTI lobby within the Church that Christians who are gay or lesbian can only achieve wholeness and healing by embracing their same-sex attraction. David Bennett's new book *A War of Loves* undercuts this argument by giving an account of how he was able to find healing and wholeness in Christ and how this led him to turn away from a life of gay activism and same-sex sexual activity.

Bennett is from Sydney, Australia, and is currently reading for a DPhil in theology at the University of Oxford. He is a fellow at the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics and holds a Master's degree in analytic theology from the University of St. Andrews. In *A War of Loves* he tells his story. As he explains in his Preface:

As a nineteen year-old atheist gay activist who felt rejected by Christianity, I had very little reason to believe in God. Then I encountered Jesus in a pub in the gay quarter of Sydney, Australia and my life changed for ever.

I wrote the book partly to help others navigate the tricky terrain of homosexuality and the Christian faith. However, my main reason for writing was simply to share how God's love impacted my life. Rather than attempt to answer every question asked about homosexuality, I hoped to provide in this book's pages a clear picture of how I was reconciled to God. The gay and Christian communities are often seen as polar opposites: one a progressive, inclusive community, the other a community of oppressive, archaic laws. Having stood on both sides I know the reality is far more complex.

The book is in five parts.

Part 1, 'The search,' describes his coming out as a teenager and his subsequent search for love and truth as a gay activist. Part 2, 'Encounter,' describes his life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ and the gospel of grace. Part 3, 'Journey into God: Sense and Sexuality,' describes how he came to understand what the Bible has to say about sex, marriage and the 'greater romance' of the Christian's relationship with God. Part 4, 'The New Identity' describes how he came to understand love and celibacy, the need to distinguish between 'acceptance' and 'affirmation' and the vital importance of friendship. Finally part 5, 'Reflections on Homosexuality and Christian faithfulness,' explores what it means to live a 'third way' of life as someone who is celibate, gay and Christian.

Two appendices look at 'What I learned the Scriptures really say about homosexuality' and 'Desiring and imaging God: The Challenges.'

As Bennett further explains, his book has three purposes:

Describe my personal quest for truth as someone from the gay community who became a Christian. Provide insights into two worlds that often misunderstand each other. Discuss the universal questions of love that both communities – indeed, all people ask.

As he also says, 'This book is not essentially about being gay. It is about finding a greater identity in Jesus Christ and becoming a Son of God.'

#### Martin's opinion:

This is a profound and moving book that describes how encountering the gospel changed Bennett's life for ever. As he says, it is not a book primarily about being gay, it is about how the grace of God in Jesus Christ changed his life and can change yours, mine, and everyone else's as well.

However it *is* a book that speaks about being gay and Christian and such it is a book that orthodox straight Christians need to read to understand better what it is like to be Christian and same-sex attracted, and also a book that needs to be used to challenge the lie that accepting the biblical view of sexuality automatically leads those with

same-sex attraction into a life of loneliness, devoid of love and full of self-loathing. Bennett shows how just the opposite can be true. Highly recommended.

Commendations:

Sean Doherty comments

Many lesbian, gay and bisexual people feel they cannot be true to both their sexuality and the Christian faith. David demonstrates that integrity and authenticity are possible for gay Christians, sharing beautiful insights about love, friendship and following Jesus too.

A helpful video by David Bennett talking about his story can be found on the *Living Out* website at <http://www.livingout.org/stories/david>

Michael Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation: Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology*, Baker Academic, ISBN 978-1-54096-047-4, £14.99 (e edition also available).

#### Overview:

Michael Goheen is Professor of Missional Theology at Covenant Theological Seminary in the United States. The subject of his new book is the ecclesiology of Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, someone who is widely recognised as having been one of the twentieth century's most important church leaders because of his involvement in the ecumenical movement and his writings on the missionary nature of the Church. Goheen studied Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology for his doctoral dissertation and after almost twenty years he has returned to this topic out of a conviction that Newbigin's insights 'continue to be relevant and important—and will be for the foreseeable future.'

Goheen explains that when Newbigin returned to the United Kingdom after forty years of missionary work in India:

He found a church that had been accommodated to the modern scientific worldview. Many had lost confidence in the gospel and had tailored their own ecclesial identity to fit the reigning idolatrous ideology of the day. The church was content to be relegated to the private realm of life, far removed from having any influence over the majority of human life. They allowed the gospel and the biblical story to be confined to the status of subjective values and personal preferences. Europe had become a pagan society shaped by an idolatrous public doctrine. It had reconfigured the gospel and the church, and the church—tragically—instead of resisting had simply capitulated.

In this situation Newbigin saw ecclesiology, understood in terms of recovering the Church's missionary identity, as 'a pressing imperative, an urgent task that might enable the Church to extract itself from captivity to the powers of Western culture.'

According to Goheen:

Newbigin never discarded the traditional concerns of ecclesiology—worship and liturgy, preaching and teaching, leadership and church order. To the contrary, he wanted to see each of these areas of the internal life of the church serve the vocation and role God had given the people of God. Neither did he neglect the traditional concerns of mission—evangelism and church planting, mercy and justice, social ethics and political engagement. Rather, he wanted to place them within a broader vision of the missionary vocation of the church. Ecclesiology was relating our identity to all these things and reshaping them in light of the role that God called his people to play in the biblical drama.

Goheen's book is a 'basic and popular introduction to Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology', but because of the nature of Newbigin's thought this means that it is also an introduction to Newbigin's view of the very nature of the Christian faith itself. In Goheen's words:

... as will quickly become evident, his ecclesiology involves much more than is normally associated with that word. Probing ecclesiology means asking foundational questions: What is the gospel? What is the Bible? What is the Christian faith? As we inquire more deeply into Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology, we begin to see a central dynamic that is shaping his thought. It is a dynamic driven by his understanding of the gospel and, we might even say, a dynamic that leads us to the very heart of the Christian faith. So this book will articulate Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology, but in the process will also uncover the core dynamic that shapes his understanding of the Christian faith and his theological vision.

#### Martin's opinion:

This book is a stimulating study of an important topic. It will be of interest to anyone wanting an introduction to the thought of Lesslie Newbigin, but it will also be of interest to anyone who wants to be pushed to think more deeply about the nature of the Church and its place in the purposes of God. It will be valuable for those training for the ministry, but also for those already in ministry who want to refresh their own thinking about the Church so that they can teach their congregations better about what the Church is and what it is for.

Commendations:

Dean Fleming has written:

Goheen is a superb interpreter of Newbigin. In this inspiring and highly readable book, Goheen invites us to rediscover Newbigin's missional ecclesiology for this generation. I appeal to pastors, students, teachers, and local church leaders: read this book! It will shape your understanding of the church's missional vocation in the world.

Lydia McGrew, *Hidden in Plain View: Undesigned Coincidences in the Gospels and Acts*, DeWard Publishing, ISBN 978-1-9363-4190-0, £14.99 (e edition also available).

#### Overview:

The American writer Lydia McGrew's new book *Undesigned Coincidences* sets out an argument for the reliability of the New Testament that was known and used in the past by Christian apologists such as William Paley, John Blunt and Thomas Birks, but which has become neglected in recent times. The argument in question is the argument from the undesigned coincidences between the Gospels and between Acts and the Epistles of St. Paul.

McGrew defines an undesigned coincidence as 'a notable connection between two or more accounts or texts that doesn't seem to have been planned by the person or people giving the accounts. Despite their apparent independence, the items fit together like pieces of a puzzle.'

As a non-biblical example of an undersigned coincidence she asks us to suppose:

... that two of your friends, Alan and Betty, tell you that they have had a distressing conversation at a coffee shop with a third friend, Carl. They tell you that Carl has confessed to some serious misdoing. Carl denies it all. He says that he never had any such conversation with Alan and Betty and never even met them at the coffee shop. The whole thing is a set-up, he claims. So you sit down with Alan and Betty separately and have them tell you what happened in their own words. At one point in his story, Alan says, 'The place was so crowded that we could hardly find a spot for all three of us to sit.'

Betty, in telling you her version, mentions, 'While we were talking, Alan accidentally knocked his coffee off into my lap.'

Alan doesn't mention knocking off the coffee, and Betty doesn't mention that the coffee shop was crowded. But these two bits of detail fit together: If they are both telling about a real meeting, and if the coffee shop really was crowded, they would have been sitting close together with little extra space for themselves and their coffee. This would make an accident with the coffee more likely. And if the coffee were spilled, it would be more likely to spill into someone's lap rather than only onto the table. This dovetailing between Alan's and Betty's stories does not look good for Carl, who is denying that any meeting happened at all.

This, then, is an example of an undesigned coincidence. It's a significant *coincidence* that Alan says that it was crowded and that Betty says that a coffee cup got knocked into her lap. It appears *undesigned* because the details are mentioned casually in a way that would be unlikely if they were colluding.

McGrew's argument is that a large number of similar undesigned coincidences can be found in the New Testament documents and just as the undersigned coincidence in her fictional story supports the veracity of Alan and Betty's account of their conversation with Carl, so also:

The occurrence of multiple undesigned coincidences between and among these documents supports the conclusion that the Gospels and Acts are historically reliable and that they come from people close to the facts who were attempting to tell truthfully what they knew.

Her argument is developed in two parts.

In part one, 'Hidden in Plain View in the Gospels,' she looks at how the Synoptic Gospels explain John, John explains the Synoptic Gospels, and how the Synoptic Gospels explain each other.

In part two, 'Hidden in Plain View in Acts and the Pauline Epistles,' she looks at the coincidences between Acts and the universally acknowledged Pauline Epistles and then at the coincidences between Acts and the other Pauline Epistles.

Space does not permit an account of all the coincidences McGrew identifies, but her account of what is said in John's Gospel about Jesus' baptism serves to illustrate her general approach. She writes about this as follows:

The Gospel of John tells the baptism of Jesus in an interesting way—by way of a flashback narrated by John the Baptist. By the time the first scene of the Gospel opens, it appears that the baptism has already taken place. John the Baptist, after pointing Jesus out as the Lamb of God, says this,

‘This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.’ And John bore witness: ‘I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.’ (John 1.30–34)

The detail of the Holy Spirit descending like a dove, familiar from Christian art throughout the ages, is also found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John the Baptist as quoted in John is explicit: He discovered who Jesus was at the time of his baptism because of a combination of factors—an interior revelation to himself from God and the visible sign of the Spirit descending like a dove. So far, so clear.

Those of us who are familiar with the baptismal accounts in Matthew, Mark, and Luke are apt to overlook, however, what John the Baptist leaves *unexplained* in this account of the baptism. He does not say why he bore witness that Jesus is the Son of God. There is no statement here that John the Baptist received a revelation that the one he was waiting for was the Son of God. One can infer that John knew something ‘heavy’ about the one he foretold from his cryptic reference to him as ‘being before him,’ discussed in the previous section. But this certainly is not a clear statement that the one to come is the Son of God.

In any event, John the Baptist seems to be referring to some further knowledge that he gained at the time of the baptism from something specific that occurred then. He says that he has ‘seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God.’ But why would the sight of the Spirit descending like a dove tell him that? What he recounts as a personal revelation is that the person on whom the Spirit descends is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Nothing about being the Son of God.

The answer is found in a well-known detail of the baptism of Jesus, but one that is not told in the Gospel of John. Here it is from Matthew:

‘And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”’ (Matt 3.16–17)

Mark 1.11 and Luke 3.22 are similar. Now John’s words are explained: John the Baptist and all who witnessed the scene at the baptism had reason to think that Jesus was the Son of God because a voice from heaven *said* that he was the Son of God. If we take it that the events recounted in the other Gospels actually occurred, this explains the words of John the Baptist in the Gospel of John.

What we see in this instance is that although the accounts of Jesus’ baptism in the Synoptic Gospels are not designed to explain what John tells us about the witness of John the Baptist they do in fact do so. We have an undesigned coincidence that gives support to what is said in John. McGrew’s contention is that this sort of undersigned coincidence occurs frequently in the New Testament and gives us confidence that what is said in the Gospels and Acts is historically true. The Gospels support each other in this way and the Pauline Epistles support Acts.

Martin’s opinion:

This is a fascinating and accessible study that adds another useful weapon to the Christian apologetic arsenal. As McGrew’s example of Alan, Betty and Carl illustrates, we are familiar with undesigned coincidences in everyday life and regard them as good reasons for thinking that what we have been told independently by different witnesses is true. In similar fashion the undesigned coincidences identified by McGrew in her book provide good reasons for thinking that what we are told in the Gospels and Acts is true. This is a book which Christians should have to hand for those occasions when people say ‘you can’t believe what is said the New Testament.’ The arguments contained in this book will help to explain why this claim does not hold water.

Commendations:

Craig Keener declares:

Here then is a valuable and accessible approach for recognizing significant historical information in the Gospels that does not simply repeat arguments that most of us have already heard. Instead it complements existing arguments in a persuasive way. Meanwhile, though without intending to answer all the questions, it also turns on its head the frequent anti-Gospel argument that rests on apparent contradictions.

New Testament commentators will be familiar with some of the connections, especially between Acts and Paul's letters, but usually not from this angle and never gathered with this cumulative force. I have learned much from, and expect McGrew's other readers to learn much from, her revival of this important but neglected argument.

Peter Orr, *Exalted Above The Heavens: The Risen And Ascended Christ*, Apollos, ISBN 978-17835-9748-2, £14.99 (e edition also available).

Overview:

Peter C. Orr is lecturer in New Testament at Moore College in Sydney, Australia. As he explains in his Introduction, his new book on the risen and ascended Christ is 'about Jesus as he is now.' It is a study of what the New Testament tells us about who Jesus is and what Jesus does as the one who has been exalted to the right hand of God the Father in heaven.

The reason why Orr thinks that this is a topic that is worth looking at is because it is one that Christians have had a tendency to neglect. As he puts it:

Generally speaking, Christians have tended to focus their attention on what Jesus *has* done (his life, death and resurrection) and what he *will* do (return and reign). And while there has been something of a revival in the study of Jesus' ascension, there is a tendency to consider Christ's exalted state simply in relation to the events of his ascension or his parousia. Studies that consider Jesus in his exalted state are relatively rare. However, the Christ that Christians trust in, relate to and love is the Christ who not only lived, died, rose and will come again but also is presently at God's right hand. Christian faith as well as Christian theological reflection must take into consideration this significant aspect of Christ's identity.

The book is divided into three main parts.

The first part consists of chapters 2–4. These chapters look at what the New Testament says about Jesus identity, considering what the New Testament has to say about the relationship between the 'earthly Jesus' and the 'exalted Christ' and how (if at all) the resurrection and ascension change Jesus' identity. They also consider and reject reading of the New Testament material 'that have effectively collapsed Christ into either the Spirit or the church.'

The second part consists of chapters 5–8. These chapters look at what the New Testament says about Jesus' location, considering how he is absent from us with his 'discrete, individual, localizable human body' being now in heaven rather than on earth, but is also present with us in a passive and mediated ('*epiphanic*') way though the Spirit, the work of the apostles and the preaching of the gospel, and also in a more active way when he is present as the agent who acts on directly on earth even though he is located in heaven.

The third part consists of chapters 9–10. These chapters look in more detail at what the New Testament says about Christ's activity. Chapter 9 looks at 'Christ's mediated activity on earth,' while chapter 10 looks at his 'activity in heaven as he responds to prayer and intercedes for believers.'

Chapter 11 concludes the book by offering some 'theological and pastoral reflections' on the material surveyed in the previous chapters. For example, he notes that the fact that the exalted Jesus 'retains a distinct, physical, human body means that, like him, we will retain our bodies for eternity. We will be transformed, we will be different, but we will retain our bodies.' For another example, he declares that the presence of Jesus in heaven means that:

When we struggle to persevere and are tempted to give up, we can remember that someone is always praying for us. And not just anyone but the risen and exalted Lord Jesus. Jesus is the one who is continually interceding that we may be saved to the uttermost.

Martin's opinion:

This book offers a comprehensive survey of what the New Testament has to say about who Christ now is and what Christ now does. It shows how to properly interpret what the New Testament says about these matters and why what it says matters for our lives as Christians today. It is a quite detailed and dense study so it will not be suitable for everyone, but it provides an excellent resource for theological teachers, students and ministers.

Commendations:

Don Carson comments:

Instead of ... using the synthetic and analytic categories of systematic theology, Dr. Orr largely confines himself to the categories deployed by the biblical writers themselves. Written with verve and clarity, this book promises not only to bring sharper thinking to a rather confused domain of Christology, but also to invite us to deeper adoration as we contemplate overlooked characteristics of our triune God.

Tim Patrick, *Anglican Foundations – A Handbook to the Source Documents of the English Reformation*, Latimer Trust, ISBN 978-1-90632-753-8, £7.99.

Overview:

Tim Patrick is the Principal of the Bible College of South Australia, where he also teaches systematic theology and practical ministry. The idea for his new book came to him in the course of his doctoral studies when his research led him to work through the ‘doctrinally determinative foundation texts’ of the Reformation Church of England:

I realised that an introductory handbook would have been of tremendous help in orienting me to the documents that I needed to study. Subsequently, it struck me that such a volume could also be useful to anyone interested in understanding these texts around which the Anglican Church has been built: not only aspiring scholars of Anglicanism, but also those serving and living out their faith in an Anglican Communion which is currently both holding fast to its history and undergoing rapid change.

*Anglican Foundations* is intended to provide such a handbook. It offers:

... a sound and scholarly (if light) introduction to the full breadth of the Church of England’s foundational documents, produced and refined in the sixteenth century when the Church of England was established and settled as a body independent of the Roman Catholic Church.

Following an introduction, the handbook consists of nine chapters. These look in turn at Articles of Religion, authorised versions of the Bible, Books of Common Prayer, Catechisms, Homilies, the Ordinal, Primers, the Paraphrases of Erasmus and Foxe’s ‘Book of Martyrs’ and legal documents.

Each chapter begins with an Introduction ‘which overviews the common traits of the family of formularies under discussion.’ This is followed by Specific Descriptions which give details of ‘each particular formulary of the general type.’ Next there is a History of the family of documents under discussion. Then Intended Purpose outlines ‘the original function and purpose of each formulary.’ Finally, Key References ‘provides a selection of the most important sources of information on each family of documents.’

Martin’s opinion:

This is an extremely helpful handbook that provides those beginning the study of the Reformation formularies the key things that they initially need to know and the most important sources of information they should look at if they want to know more. This should become required reading for those studying for Church of England ministry and for those already in ministry who were not given this sort of information as part of their training or who need to refresh their memory. As Patrick says:

If our past did establish truly healthy foundations and set positive long-term trajectories for a constantly reforming Church, it is worth the effort to understand it right so that it can make its full and proper contribution today.

The value of his handbook is that it will help people to ‘understand it right.’

Commendations:

Lee Gatiss has written:

This is a splendid handbook on the various officially sanctioned formularies of the Anglican Church. Dr. Patrick very helpfully outlines the primary sources, their contents and contexts, and gives us useful pointers for further study and reflection. An essential starting point for any investigation of historic Anglicanism and the Protestant faith established by the English Reformation.

Jackie Hill Perry, *Gay Girl, Good God: The Story of Who I Was, and Who God Has Always Been*, B&H Publishing, ISBN 978-1-46275-122-8, £13.50 (e and audio editions also available).

Overview:

Jackie Hill Perry is a black American writer, poet and artist whose work has been featured in the *Washington Times* as well as Christian sites such as *Desiring God* and *The Gospel Coalition*. She was brought up without a father and suffered from gender confusion. At High School she entered into a lesbian relationship with another student. Then at nineteen God broke into her life and warned her that she was heading towards death. She heeded the message and began the long slow journey towards wholeness.

*Gay Girl, Good God* is the story of her life combined with her theological reflections upon it and a final section in which she presents what she has learned as a resource for others.

It is not an easy book to summarise, but three extracts will give a flavour of the whole.

First, writing about her experience of being convicted of sin she writes that she discovered that:

Allowing my sexuality to rule me was a death sentence, but so was everything else. Before tonight, I wouldn't have called myself self-righteous. The common church crowd, with their raised noses, and long skirts, prancing around like they were born saved, sanctified and filled with the Holy Ghost, were the ones who fit that description, not me. They were the ones that forgot that their rags were filthy even if their clothes were clean. They'd lost memory of how God couldn't be bribed with good works and big hats. Heaven only opened its gates for those Jesus escorted in, but they were the kind of folk that invited themselves and called it righteousness.

But I – unbeknownst to me – had been swayed by this same leaven. If only I could just be straight, and lay aside my homosexuality, God would accept me and call me his own, I used to think. This delusion was the belief that only one aspect of my life was worthy of judgment, while the rest deserved heaven. That my other vices were 'not as bad.' They were just struggles that I had to work on instead of repenting.... A thorough survey of my heart, led entirely by the Holy Spirit, allowed me to see what I had never seen: that I needed not only freedom from homosexuality, but from all sin. I was holistically in need of God.

Secondly, reflecting on her marriage to her husband, Preston, she writes

From the outside looking in, it could be assumed that Preston's and my relationship was God's proof of turning a 'gay girl good.' But really, He'd already done that the moment He'd set me free from sin...Preston and I were brought together not so that we could become the standard of what is to become of all gay girls and boys turned believers. We were brought together for the primary reason of pointing to the mystery of God's gospel (Ephesians 5:32). Marriage was the way God wanted *me* to glorify him. Becoming one flesh would not complete me. Marriage is not what would make me whole, but it would be God's work in and through my marriage, along with whatever else the Potter chose to use to shape me as His clay that would. God was my first love. I'd married Him way before I did Preston, and I'd be married to Him even after death parted me from the man I vowed to love until then.

Thirdly, explaining the connection between God's identity and ours she comments:

The root of all sin is unbelief in God. The fall began when Adam and Eve doubted what God said about Himself. It is the identity that we ascribe to God out of doubt or faith in His Scriptures that will determine the identity we will give ourselves and ultimately the life that we inevitably live. If He is the Creator, then we are created. If he is Master, then we are servants. If he is love, then we are loved. If he is omnipotent, then we are not as powerful as we think. If he is omniscient, then there is nowhere to hide. If He cannot lie, then His promises are all true. It is faith in the truths of God's character that has the power to completely revolutionize how our lives are lived out. Not only that, there is so much joy to be had on Earth because there is more glory in God than we can imagine.

Martin's opinion:

This book is a hugely powerful testimony to the grace of God. Like St. Augustine's *Confessions* it is autobiography and theological reflection rolled into one. Like the book by David Bennett reviewed above, it is helpful as a counter to the now familiar gay narrative that says being gay or lesbian is immutable and can be a godly way of life. However it is not a book that is primarily a challenge to this gay narrative. It is rather a testimony to how God transforms the lives of all those who turn to him in repentance and faith and how he can give them a life that is better than they could ever have imagined. A book worth reading, meditating on and passing on to others.

Commendations:

Kristen Wetherell writes:

What I love most about *Gay Girl, Good God* is how it unashamedly declares what's true. Perry centers on and celebrates who *God* is and what he's done. In writing memoir, we can be so focused on ourselves that we forget who wrote our story, and whose story ours is meant to reflect. We end up pointing people to us, rather than to the God who saves.

But Perry's story points to Jesus Christ through and through, and without hesitation. Her practical theology is clear, robust, and will equip those who read.

Walter Schumm, *Same-Sex Parenting Research: A Critical Assessment*, Nielson, ISBN 978-0-99568-328-0, £14.00 (e edition also available).

Overview:

Walter Schumm is a Professor of family studies at Kanas State University in the United States. In this book he gives a critical assessment of the work that has been done by social scientists on what happens when children are brought up by two people of the same sex who are in a homosexual relationship.

For several decades it has been claimed that children in this situation fare as well, if not better, as children with two parents of the opposite sex and a number of recent research studies have appeared which appear to support this claim. In his book Schumm calls into question the positive outcomes reported in these studies. In his words:

In this book I will examine and report those outcomes in more detail than have most scholars. The results will show, at the very least, that the situation is more complicated than many have allowed or, at the worst, that much of the way in which the research has been interpreted has been biased in favour of progressive values.

The book is in six main parts.

Part 1 gives a detailed explanation of what is involved in high quality social science research and the sets out the sorts of questions that need to be asked about the results of any research, such as 'Have all relevant variables been measured and tested? Have all subpopulations been studied? Have the best statistical models been tested appropriately?'

Part 2 looks at what we actually know about same-sex parents, looking at the numbers involved, family stability in different types of households, the issue of sexual abuse within families and the values and behaviours of same-sex parents.

Parts 3 and 4 take a very close look at the evidence concerning the well-being of children in households with same-sex parents and questions the claims that are made about positive outcomes for children raised in such households.

For example, he questions the claim that is often made that being brought up by homosexual parents makes no difference to the sexual preferences of the children concerned. According to Schumm 'There are now dozens of studies that appear to refute the 'no difference' hypothesis with only a few that do not essentially (in terms of effect sizes, if not statistical significance) refute it.'

For another example, he challenges the claim that having same-sex parents can be shown to make no difference to children's mental health, arguing that proper account has not been taken of the overall nature of the families involved:

Until studies routinely control for pre-existing differences between the two groups of parents and control for social desirability, I doubt that we will get to the bottom of this issue. It is not correct scientifically to take a group of highly educated, wealthy, mentally healthy same-sex parents and compare their children to the children of uneducated, poor, mentally ill heterosexual parents and think you have set up a fair comparison.

Part 5 looks at the consequences of same-sex marriage. It challenges the idea that the evidence shows that there are no negative consequences, arguing that same-sex marriage can be shown to be socially damaging, including having an adverse impact on fertility rates.

Part 6 draws the threads of the argument together. Schumm argues that it is disappointing that:

....many U.S. courts were misled into accepting as valid research, research that was biased, incomplete, and focused on significance levels rather than effects sizes. Numerous studies whose results would have been inconvenient for the 'no difference' hypothesis were overlooked or ignored. Research on same-sex parenting has often been cited because it came to the politically correct conclusions, not because it was of the highest quality. In one sense, this book is an attempt to redress that imbalance.

As Schumm sees it, the evidence indicates that much of the research on same-sex parenting seems to have been politically motivated and to have been shaped by dogma rather than science. His overall conclusion is that:

There do appear to be significant and substantial differences between same-sex and heterosexual parents and in the long-term outcomes of their children, contrary to many, many allegations by numerous social scientists over the past decades.

Martin's opinion:

This book is an important contribution to the debate about same-sex parenting and it deserves to be widely read. Like the work of his fellow sociologist Mark Regenerus, this work by Walter Schumm takes a long, hard look at the research that is cited in support of same-sex parenting and finds it wanting. It shows that the research in question simply does not support the claim that the outcome for the children concerned is no different and may even be better. It is often said that opposition to same-sex parenting is driven by dogma rather than science. What Schumm establishes is that the opposite is true.

Commendations:

Bill Muehlenberg declares:

In this extremely valuable and superbly researched volume everything you wanted to know about social science research and the issue of homosexual parenting is to be found. Schumm shows that much of it is incomplete, skewed, selective and politicised.

Christopher Watkin, *Thinking Through Creation: Genesis 1 and 2 as Tools of Cultural Critique, Presbyterian and Reformed*, ISBN 978-1-62995-301-4, £17.99 (e edition also available).

Overview:

Christopher Watkin lectures in French Studies at Monash University in Australia, where he also teaches in the Literary Studies and Religion and Theology programmes.

As Watkin explains in his opening chapter, the conviction underlying his new book is that:

...to explain the Bible to the culture in which we live is not enough; we must also explain the culture in which we live in terms of the Bible.

With this in mind, his book:

...explores how to view our culture through the lens of the biblical account of the Trinitarian God and his creative act as recorded in Genesis 1 and 2, using biblical ways of thinking to meet the challenge of engaging in authentic, positive, and constructive dialogue with the great ideas and values of our time.

This exploration is conducted in three main chapters.

In his second chapter Watkin considers the relationship between the doctrine of the Trinity and 'a distinctively Christian understanding of the world.' The existence of the Trinity, he argues, shows that:

The most fundamental reality, more fundamental even than the matter and energy of the universe is the absolute, personal, triune loving God. This reality shapes the Christian view of the whole of life and society by ennobling the human person, putting a high value on relationships, and seeing human flourishing in terms not primarily of power but of love.

In his third chapter Watkin teases out 'the intellectual and social implications of the creation of the universe in Genesis 1 and 2. He introduces the biblical idea of the fundamental distinction between the creator and the creature and shows how this distinction 'revolutionizes human relations' by replacing a dynamic of 'reciprocal favour' with one that reflects the dynamic of grace shown in God's relationship to us. He then goes on to argue that the biblical view of creation offers an alternative to 'the fact-value dichotomy' that underpins much modern philosophy and ethics and that it provides the foundation for 'a distinctively Christian understanding of beauty in the context of a created superabundance that challenges prevailing cultural values of efficiency and productivity.'

In his fourth chapter, Watkin focusses on the biblical account of the creation of humanity. He looks at how this account:

...refuses both the devaluing and deification of humanity, how the creation mandate weaves human creativity and industry into the purposes of God, how nature is neither to be worshipped nor exploited, how intellectual and manual labor each feature in the description of the work given to Adam in the garden, and how the rhythm of work and Sabbath builds into creation a resistance to totalitarian, universal values and the homogenization of time.

In this way, he says:

...the Bible's opening chapters provide a suite of principles and ideas that not only help shape a distinctively biblical way of being in the world and in contemporary society, but also address some of the most salient concerns of that society in fresh and exciting ways.

In a fifth and final chapter he summarises his argument and explain how it points to the importance of developing a 'biblical theory' which can act as an alternative to contemporary world views such as eco-theory, feminist theory and postcolonial theory and that 'will not just critique contemporary culture and society, but provide a vision for its flourishing.'

Each of the main chapters has a series of questions for further reflection and an extensive list of suggestions for further reading.

Martin's opinion:

The three fundamental questions, 'What is the universe like?' 'What does it mean to be human?' and 'How can we live rightly?' have been asked since the dawn of time and are still being asked by people today. In his important book Watkin shows how the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and the Biblical teaching about creation provides answers to these questions that are more attractive and have more explanatory power than the answers provided by non-Christian ways of thought. In so doing he also models a serious Christian engagement with the cultural issues of our time.

Although this is an intellectually rigorous book it is also very readable. It would be a good book to give to a serious enquirer wanting to understand the Christian worldview. It would also make an excellent text for a college course on this subject or for a house group interested in a serious intellectual engagement with the topics Watkin covers.

Commendations:

Dan Strange has written:

Just brilliant! ... In a rare combination, Watkin shows us at the deepest level what it means to read the world through the Word, but in a way that is genuinely accessible. His demonstrations of biblical patterns and structures are incredibly helpful.

Peter J Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?*, Crossway Books, ISBN 978-143355-295-3, £14.29 (e edition also available).

#### Overview:

Peter Williams is a New Testament scholar who is the Principal of Tyndale House Cambridge and an expert on the text of the Greek New Testament. As he explains in the Preface, the purpose of his new book is to explain 'to a general audience some of the vast amount of evidence for the trustworthiness of the four Gospels.'

The book is in eight chapters.

Chapter one, 'What do Non-Christian Sources Say?,' looks at the evidence of the earliest non-Christian witnesses to Jesus, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger and Josephus, shows how quickly the gospel spread across the Roman Empire, and explains how key beliefs found in the Gospels, such as belief in the Deity of Christ, were recognised at an early date by non-Christian observers as being part of what Christians believed.

Chapter two, 'What Are the Four Gospels?,' looks at the dating, interdependence and authorship of the Gospels.

Chapter three, 'Did the Gospel Authors Know Their Stuff?,' demonstrates that comparison with other sources shows that the Gospels accurately reflect the geography, culture and history of first century Palestine.

Chapter four, 'Undesigned Coincidences,' shows how the Gospels include incidental details that could only have been known about by someone who was an eyewitness to the events that the Gospels describe.

Chapter five, 'Do We Have Jesus's Actual Words?,' discusses the languages Jesus would have spoken as a first century Palestinian Jew and what an accurate quotation of someone's words meant in the in the first century. Its conclusion is that the followers of Jesus would have been quite capable of passing on accurate traditions about what Jesus said, including some of the actual Aramaic, Hebrew or Greek words that he used.

Chapter six, 'Has the Text Changed?,' addresses the idea that the text of the Gospels may have been altered to suit the needs of later Christian orthodoxy. Drawing on his expertise in textual criticism, Williams argues that the Greek text of the Gospels accurately reflects what the writers of the Gospels originally wrote and that the rapid and widespread diffusion of the Gospels in the Early Church rules out the idea that someone was able to introduce major variations into the text of the Gospels that were then reflected in all the numerous versions of them that were in circulation.

Chapter seven, 'What about Contradictions?' looks briefly at the alleged contradictions in and between the Gospels and argues that that when rightly understood these contradictions are more apparent than real and should not undermine our confidence in the Gospels' historical reliability.

Chapter eight, 'Who Would Make All This Up?' concludes that the simplest and best way to understand the Gospels as we now have them is to accept that they are what they claim to be, namely trustworthy accounts of Jesus' life and teaching.

#### Martin's opinion:

*Can We Trust the Gospels?* is a relatively short book (160 pages), but in its short compass it gives a comprehensive, scholarly and yet readable defence of the Gospels' trustworthiness. It is a great gift to be able to convey up to date scholarly study in a way that those with no background in a subject can easily understand, but that is what Williams manages to do in this volume. It is a study that will be equally useful for students beginning the study of the Gospels at college or university and for open minded enquirers who quite reasonably want to know why Christians think the Gospels can be trusted. An excellent book that can be highly recommended.

#### Commendations:

Simon Gathercole writes:

This much-needed book provides a mine of information for Christians wanting to know more about the historical background to the Gospels and offers a series of challenges to those skeptical of what we can know

about Jesus. Peter Williams has distilled a mass of information and thought into this short and accessible book, and it deserves careful reading both inside and outside the church.

M B Davie 7.1.1