

Latimer Trust

Monthly Reading List – June 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
Denis Alexander	<i>Is There Purpose in Biology?: The cost of existence and the God of love</i>	Not everyone will agree with large parts of Alexander's case. However, all Christians will be helped by his refutation of the argument that biology shows that existence is without purpose.
Gaby Doherty	<i>Grenfell Hope: Stories from the community</i>	This is a candid and moving account which will be of interest to anyone who wants to understand what happened from a Christian perspective and be challenged to bring hope and healing to their own community.
Adam Mabry	<i>The Art of Rest</i>	Maby's user friendly introduction to the art of rest deserves to be widely read.
Pablo Martinez and Andrew Sims	<i>Mad or God?: Jesus: The Healthiest Mind of All</i>	This book is an important contribution to the Christian apologetic arsenal. It is a book to buy, to study, to share, and to give away.
Sarah Melcher, Mikeal Parsons and Amos Yong (eds.)	<i>The Bible and Disability: A Commentary</i>	Evangelicals need to read it and engage with what its authors have to say, if only to think how they might do the same exercise better.
Stephen Noll	<i>The Global Anglican Communion</i>	This collection of essays constitutes a primary source document for anyone who wishes to understand the recent history and present state of the Anglican Communion.
Ian Paul	<i>Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary</i>	This is an excellent contribution to the Tyndale commentary series. . Not everyone will agree with all the details of Paul's exegesis and interpretation, but anyone who wants to understand Revelation better will benefit from reading what he has to say.
W Brian Shelton	<i>Quest for the Historical Apostles: Tracing Their Lives and Legacies</i>	If anybody wants an up to date summary of what we know about the life and labours of the Apostles and how they have been viewed down the centuries then this is now the book to which to turn.
Simon Vibert	<i>The Perpetual Battle: The World, the Flesh and the Devil</i>	This is an excellent, accessible, introduction to a vital topic. Christians need to understand that they are in war and need to know how to conduct this war effectively. Highly recommended.
Martyn and Hannah Whittock	<i>The Vikings: From Odin to Christ</i>	All Christians should want to know the story of how God has acted in the history of the nations and this book fills in part of this story.

Denis Alexander, *Is There Purpose in Biology?: The cost of existence and the God of love*, Monarch Books, ISBN 978-0-85721-714-1, £ 12.77 (e edition also available).

Martin's opinion:

Alexander's argument is based on an acceptance of a belief in the theory of large scale biological evolution developed by Charles Darwin and others in the nineteenth century. Obviously, not all Christians accept this theory and those who take a 'creationist' position instead will necessarily disagree with large parts of Alexander's case. However, all Christians will be helped by his refutation of the argument that biology shows that existence is without purpose and all Christians will likewise benefit from his positive argument that the good that creation enables is worth the suffering that is present within it.

Even if you hold that all the suffering in creation is a result of the Fall, you are still left with the question of whether the existence of creation is worth the pain it involves and Alexander puts forward a good case for being able to say that it is.

Overview:

Denis Alexander is Emeritus Director of The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion at St. Edmunds College, Cambridge and the writer of numerous books and articles on the relationship between science and Christian faith.

His new book is based on the Herrmann lectures which he delivered at Gordon College in the United States in November 2014. In these lectures, and now in his book, he addresses the question of whether the evidence that we have from the study of biology is consistent with the Christian belief that the world we inhabit has been created for a good purpose by a loving God.

Atheist writers such as Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett have declared vociferously that the evidence of biology is inconsistent with this belief. Alexander's aim is to challenge this conclusion.

He develops his argument in six chapters.

Chapter one explores the historical reasons why the issue of purpose and the study of biology have become entangled over the centuries.

Chapters two and three pick up the challenge of writers such as Dawkins and Dennett who propose that biology shows no sign of purpose by offering 'examples from contemporary biology, some of them very recent discoveries, that do not seem consistent with such a claim.'

Chapter four looks at 'the broader questions of what we mean by terms such as 'random' and 'chance' and how these terms are used in biology in ways often different from their usage in daily speech and even in other branches of science.'

Chapter five 'considers how and why biology can readily be incorporated into Christian creation theology.'

Finally chapter six addresses the question of how 'an evolutionary history involving so much suffering and death' can be 'squared with the Christian understanding of a God of love.' It argues 'that the costly price of existence is worth the price' because it makes possible the existence of creatures who can live in a free relationship of love with their creator.

Commendations:

Jeff Hardin has written

'Denis Alexander has written a book that clears away a great deal of woolly-headed thinking about a crucial topic. On the one hand, does what we know about the biological world indicate that at bottom the world lacks purpose, as New Atheists claim? If on the other, as Christians affirm, a loving God is the creator of all, how are we to think well about how He interacts with the world He has created? Is the evolutionary history of life really as driven by 'random chance' as so many would have us believe?

As in his other writings, *Is There Purpose in Biology?* addresses these challenging questions in an honest, accessible way that Christians, and those curious about Christian faith and the remarkable world of biology, will find immensely helpful.'

Gaby Doherty, *Grenfell Hope: Stories from the community*, SPCK, ISBN 978-0-28107-962-9, £8.99 (e book and audio editions also available).

Martin's opinion:

This is a candid and moving first-hand account of what happened on the night of the Grenfell fire and in the days and weeks that followed. It shows how ordinary people responding with love and compassion can make a difference and be God's instruments of healing in a broken world. It will be of interest to anyone who wants to understand what happened at Grenfell Tower from a Christian perspective and who wants to be challenged to bring hope and healing to their own community.

Overview:

When fire broke out in the Grenfell Tower block of flats in North Kensington on 14 June 2017 it led to the death of seventy two people and to hundreds more being made homeless.

Gaby Doherty and her husband Sean, who is a Church of England minister, live with their four children in a flat across from Grenfell Tower and Sean was the first member of the clergy on the scene after the fire broke out. *Grenfell Hope* is an account of the experiences of Gaby, her family, and other members of the local community. It tells how God worked in the hearts of the local community and across the country as a whole to bring hope in a situation of apparent hopelessness and despair.

As Doherty explains in the Preface to her book:

.... hope is hard to find in times like this. We need hope, though, to retain our sanity and to encourage healing and forgiveness. Many people have told me that there is no hope; they are right that the fire was hopeless and nothing good can be found to say about death and suffering. However, I choose to believe that there can be hope in the wake of horror and tragedy.

Many beautiful people lost their lives. Behind each one of those is a grieving family, devastated friends and a bewildered community. Nothing that I write could ever make the events of that evening seem anything but devastating. But for myself, my family, my friends, I wanted to try to find hope and share it.

Her book is a record of her search for hope and her testimony to where she found it, a testimony which she shares to encourage others to look for and create signs of hope and transformation in their own communities. In her words:

Some stories may seem small and insignificant when the reality is that at the time of writing few of the survivors have new homes yet. Many are still in hotels and temporary accommodation. The public inquiry and police enquiries are still under way. Yet one tragic day meant that humanity planted so many tiny seeds which grew into something precious. Isaiah 61 tells of beauty coming from ashes and the rebuilding of ancient ruins. This book is my attempt at discerning beauty among the ashes, and my prayer is that, whatever ashes you are facing, you too may find beauty from them in time.

My purpose is to tell the story from my perspective and share some of the stories of my friends. Hopefully these will encourage and inspire you to seek transformation in your own community, without the goad of a hideous tragedy. These stories are just a tiny pixel, just one perspective. The whole picture is much bigger and there are even more amazing stories to tell. Perhaps one day someone will capture the rest of it. I simply offer the Grenfell Hope that I have seen and experienced.

Commendations:

Andy Peck writes:

'The 'hope' shines in a myriad of ways ... You would expect this to be a tough and moving read, and it is. Doherty writes candidly about her own reactions: the gut-wrenching pain, and times of overwhelming sadness, but also her sense of calling to the area. Her measured political comment reflects a community shocked, grieving and angry; one that is now finding its voice.'

Adam Mabry, *The Art of Rest*, Good Book Company, ISBN 978-1-78498-320-8, £7.99, (e book and audio versions also available).

Martin's opinion:

This is a relatively short book (112 pages), but is an important one. Overwork and lack of rest are endemic in Christian circles and among ministers in particular, but this is not what God intends for his people. Christians therefore need to learn to understand God's gift of rest and how to allow this gift to make a difference in their lives and ministries. Maby's user friendly introduction to the art of rest will help with both. It deserves to be widely read.

Overview:

Adam Mabry is Lead Pastor of Aleithia Church in Boston in the United States. As he explains in his introduction he learned about the need to rest the hard way by almost working himself to death:

On the outside everything looked successful – great job, great wife, great kids, great house – and yet all of this was breaking me. Physically, I was exhausted. Spiritually I was dry. Emotionally, I was slipping into the deepest depression of my life.

In the light of his experience, he says:

I'm writing this book hoping you can learn to rest – how to rest and why you should and why it's great. And I'm hoping that you can start enjoying it before you reach the point of crashing like I did.

As Maby sees it, rest is both a gift from God and an art that has to be practiced:

True rest is a gift given to us in Christ. He is, as the writer of Hebrews says, the hoped for Sabbath rest for God's people (Hebrews 4 v 9–10), inviting all of us burnt out achievers, weary parents, worn-down workers and strung-out students, to come to him and receive rest. Just like music is a gift of the composer to the player, rest is a gift from Jesus to the Christian. And, just like music needs to be played, rest must be practiced.

As he goes on to explain, his book is a biblically based and Jesus centred primer on how to practice the art of rest:

This book is my attempt to offer you a mercifully short starter in the art of rest. Because rest is a sizeable theme in the Scriptures, we will journey through both the Old and New Testaments to follow the contours of this theme. And because Jesus is the hero of the grand story of Scripture, he'll be the one to whom the whole practice points – the virtuoso in whom rest is embodied and with whom rest is truly enjoyed.

The book starts by considering in the light of Scripture what rest actually is. It then looks at why the Bible teaches us that rest is so important and what the importance of rest means for our relationships. Finally, it outlines how we can actually go about practicing the art of rest.

Commendations:

Stephen Mansfield comments:

'How fascinating to read a book about one of the greatest challenges of our time, written by a man who once failed miserably in the face of that challenge. In these pages, Adam Mabry gives us what we most need—a vision of rest tethered to God, rooted in the practical, and shot through with a humorous understanding of our work-addicted folly. This book is a gift!'

Pablo Martinez and Andrew Sims, *Mad or God?: Jesus: The Healthiest Mind of All*, Inter-Varsity Press, ISBN £ 978-1-78359-605-8, £9.99.

Martin's opinion:

This book is an important contribution to the Christian apologetic arsenal. It takes seriously one of the key modern challenges to the Christian faith and shows that when this challenge is accepted it backfires on the sceptics. The sceptics have appealed to the issue of Jesus's mental health, but Martinez and Sims show that a professional assessment of the evidence shows that Jesus was uniquely mentally healthy, a conclusion which raises the question 'why, then, don't you believe what he says about himself?' This is a book to buy, to study, to share, and to give away.

Overview:

In his book *Mere Christianity*, C S Lewis posed what has come to be known as the 'Lewis trilemma.' He argued that the evidence of the Gospels means that Jesus had to be either mad, bad, or God and since the evidence further suggests that he was not mad or bad it follows that he was God.

In the years since *Mere Christianity* was written, the Lewis trilemma has become a standard part of Christian apologetic. However, Lewis's conclusion that Jesus has to be regarded as God because he wasn't mad or bad has been challenged by anti-Christian writers, such as the so-called 'new atheists,' who have argued that what the Gospels in fact suggest was that Jesus was mentally disturbed.

In their new book *Mad or God?* two senior Christian psychiatrists, Pablo Martinez from Barcelona and Andrew Sims from the University of Leeds, take this challenge to the Christian faith head on. As psychiatrists they have spent their professional lives reviewing the state of people's mental health and in their book they apply their experience to assessing the mental state of Jesus as this is depicted in the Gospels.

Their book is in two parts.

Part 1, 'Showing that Jesus was not mentally ill' looks at 'the mind of Christ through a psychiatrist's eye' and considers whether there is any evidence that Jesus was psychotic or suffered from any other kind of mental disorder. Its conclusion is that there is no evidence that Jesus suffered from any kind of mental illness.

Part 2, 'Showing that Jesus had a healthy mind,' looks at how this is proved by the coherence of Jesus words and deeds, such coherence being a standard proof of someone's mental health. They look at his character, the consistency of his life, his ability to establish meaningful relationships, his ability to cope with adversity and the way his influence changed people's lives for the better and argue that all these tests show that Jesus was not only not insane, but that he had a uniquely healthy mind, what the book's subtitle calls 'the healthiest mind of all.'

In their epilogue 'The test of his claims - who do you say I am?' they set out the claims that Jesus made for himself and note that if the evidence indicates that Jesus was mentally healthy this then means that we have to take these claims seriously. If he wasn't mad, and if there is no sign he was bad, it follows that the only rational path is to accept his self-testimony.

Commendations:

Chris Cook declares:

'*Mad or God?* is a unique and unusual book about Jesus, written by two Christian psychiatrists. Taking into account Jesus's mental state, consistency of life, character, and relationships as portrayed in the gospels, Martinez and Sims show that there is not only a lack of evidence that Jesus was ever mentally unwell, but that he should be considered to have had 'the healthiest mind of all.' If it was ever too easy to dismiss the claims of Jesus on the grounds that he must have been mad, this book makes it difficult again. Don't read it if you don't want to take Jesus seriously!'

Sarah Melcher, Mikeal Parsons and Amos Yong (eds.), *The Bible and Disability: A Commentary*, SCM, ISBN 978-0-33405-686-7, £35.00 (hardback and e editions also available).

Martin's opinion:

This is the first comprehensive commentary on the Bible from the perspective of disability and, for reasons I outline below, Evangelicals need to read it and engage with what its authors have to say, if only to think how they might do the same exercise better.

Overview:

There has been a growing recognition in recent years that those who read the Bible will see different things in it depending on the perspective from which they are reading it. This means that in order to have our own understanding of what God has to say to us through the Bible widened and deepened we need to read it in the light of works by writers who approach it from a whole range of different perspectives.

The new SCM volume edited by Sarah Melcher, Mikeal Parsons and Amos Yong, which is part of the 'Studies in Religion, Theology, and Disability' series, contributes to this process of reading the Bible from different perspectives by offering a series of essays that comment on the books of the Old and New Testaments from the perspective of those with mental or physical disability.

This volume is not the first in its field. There have been previous books on the Bible and disability such as Candida Moss and Jeremy Schipper's *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature*, Saul Olyan's *Disability in the Hebrew Bible* and Amos Yong's *The Bible, Disability and the Church*. As Melcher explains in her introduction, the essays in *The Bible and Disability*:

....attempt to follow the best aspects of their predecessors. Although the work in this volume is informed by disability studies, the contributors to this volume are very attentive to historical and cultural contexts for the literature they study. Each individual contributor has been chosen because of his or her expertise in the block of literature in which he or she is working. In addition, each contributor has demonstrated an interest in the study of disability and the Bible. *The Bible and Disability: A Commentary* differs from some of the previous work in the field because of the more comprehensive nature of the volume. Much of the previous work in disability and the Bible has examined discrete passages, while this volume approaches blocks of literature because of the purpose to introduce the reader to a comprehensive look at the way disability is represented in the Bible as a whole.

As she further explains:

The essays in this volume represent a variety of methodological approaches and a spectrum of attitudes and assumptions related to the nature and authority of Scripture. Since the editors of this volume wanted to include a wide representation of Scripture scholars working in the field of disability and the Bible, we have allowed much latitude in regard to personal commitment among our authors. Whatever their theological stance or religious commitments, all are biblical scholars with extensive training in biblical criticism. Their careful reading of texts, their awareness of historical, sociological, and cultural contexts, their knowledge of biblical languages, and their engagement with disability studies all offer grist for the theological mill, whatever the theological stance or personal commitments of the readers. We encourage the reader to read these essays thoughtfully, even though the reader may disagree with some of the assumptions or theological frameworks of the authors. The insights that are offered here are worth consideration to see if they can be applied, with possible revision, to the reader's own theological context. All the essays have a common concern to read the Bible through the lens of disability, informed by the experience of human beings with disabilities.

This second point by Melcher warns Evangelical readers that there will be material in this commentary that they will disagree with, both in terms of its theological assumptions and in terms of its consequent exegesis of the biblical text. However, this is a book which Evangelicals need to read for three reasons. First, because it will serve to introduce them to the growing field of biblical studies undertaken from a disabled perspective. Secondly, because

alongside the material with which they disagree they will find valuable positive insights. Thirdly, because even the material they disagree with will force them to think more deeply about how we should read the Bible in relation to the existence of people with disabilities.

Commendations:

Walter Brueggemann comments:

'Our society has been slow to acknowledge and take up responsibility for the wellbeing of disabled persons among us. We have been slower still in grasping the urgent theological dimensions of the issue of disability. This impressive roster of contributors breaks new ground in exploring the interface of biblical testimony and the reality of disability and in seeing in the biblical text the inescapable reality of disability. For many readers, this collection of fine essays will constitute a steep learning curve for seeing what we had not seen in the text, and thinking what we had not thought as a result of new seeing. The writers and editors are to be congratulated on this impressive and instructive study.'

Stephen Noll, *The Global Anglican Communion*, Anglican House Publishing, ISBN 978-0-99939-107-5, £14.77.

Martin's opinion:

This collection of essays constitutes a primary source document for anyone who wishes to understand the recent history and present state of the Anglican Communion. Noll was a first-hand witness to the developments he describes and his essays lay out in a clear and persuasive fashion what happened in the Anglican Communion, what the issues at stake were and how the Communion should develop in the future in response to these developments. Anyone interested in Anglicanism should read this book.

Overview:

Stephen Noll, is Professor Emeritus at Trinity School for Ministry and retired Vice Chancellor of Uganda Christian University. He has been deeply involved in the development of GAFCON and is the Special Advisor on the Global Anglican future for the Anglican Church in North America.

Since the early 1990s Noll has been a leading advocate of the orthodox Christian position in the disputes about human sexuality that have divided the Anglican Communion. *The Global Anglican Communion* is a collection of twelve essays written by him between 1993 and 2016 that charts the development of these disputes and in the light of them argues for:

....a renewed and reformed Global Anglican Communion, a communion of churches which builds on the heritage of the Church of England and represents the emerging leadership of formerly colonial Anglican churches, with the oversight of doctrine and discipline shifted from Canterbury to the Global South.

The collection is in three sections.

The first section, 'Preparing the Way: Bible, Marriage and Church,' contains essays from an Orthodox Anglican perspective on three 'essential doctrines' – the doctrine of Scripture, the doctrine of human nature and the doctrine of the Church – 'that have come under attack in the modern postmodern era, and have precipitated the crisis in Anglican identity.'

The second section, 'From Lambeth to Jerusalem: the Road to GAFCON 1998-2008,' describes 'the two historic conferences in contemporary Anglican history – the 1998 Lambeth Conference and the 2008 Global Anglican Future Conference in Jerusalem; and it explains the two principal documents that emerged from each conference – Lambeth Resolution 1.10 on Human Sexuality and the Jerusalem Statement and Declaration.'

The third section, 'Is there a Global Anglican Future? : The Road Ahead 2008-2018,' sets out a vision for a reformed Global Anglican Communion characterised by an over-arching covenant, conciliar governance, and a united resolve to carry the Great Commission forward in the face of militant Islam and militant secularism.

Commendations:

Eliud Wabukala writes:

'Professor Stephen Noll has written an accurate analysis on the genesis of the breakdown of order in the Anglican Communion due to heresy supported and perpetuated by the ecclesiastical establishment. It's a compelling apologia for the reform and revival of the communion.'

Ian Paul, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, IVP, ISBN 978-1-78359-345-3, £15.99 (e edition also available).

Martin's opinion:

This is an excellent contribution to the Tyndale commentary series. It draws on both the history of the interpretation of Revelation and the best insights of contemporary scholarship. It is scholarly and yet easy to read and it very helpfully explains what St. John was saying to his original readers and how this is still relevant to Christians today. Inevitably, not everyone will agree with all the details of Paul's exegesis and interpretation, but anyone who wants to understand Revelation better for the reasons Paul outlines will benefit from reading what he has to say. For those wanting to build up their commentary library this is definitely a 'should buy.'

Overview:

Ian Paul is a freelance theologian who was formerly Dean of Studies at St John's College Nottingham. He has studied and taught Revelation for many years and has now produced a major new commentary on Revelation for the Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series. In his introduction Paul notes that Revelation is book that is 'widely neglected.' However, he says, there are two reasons why Christians 'need to engage responsibly with this text.'

First:

Revelation is the book that above all others tests our ability to read scripture well. People who might agree on the meaning and significance of other texts in the New Testament or other parts of the Bible suddenly find themselves at odds when it comes to making sense of this one. It demands that we pay attention and listen well, that we allow the text to be 'other' than us without us imposing our own assumptions on it, and it calls us to be rooted in its canonical context as part of scripture. There is no more urgent need for God's people than to recover both confidence and competence in our reading of Scripture (all our current disagreements are symptoms of this) and reading Revelation provokes us to address this.

Secondly:

Revelation is the most developed example of a writer in scripture wrestling with the ideological implications of the gospel, and engaging with an opposing ideological system in the light of what God has done for us in Jesus, as shaped by the inspiration of the Spirit. The near-universal decline in church attendance in the West is a sign that, like the Christians in Sardis, Western Christians have been caught napping: the ideological climate has shifted dramatically in the last generation or two, and we have been so complacent and content with a 'Christendom' model of society that we haven't known how to respond. Whilst Christians in other parts of the world have not experienced this, globalization and the spread of economic wealth could see the same thing happen elsewhere in the next generation. Revelation shows us very clearly how to be alert to the context we are in, how to both engage with and stand up to the pressure of ideology, and give us the resources to live courageously in an inhospitable climate.

In order to promote the engagement he is calling for Paul has given us a commentary that provides a detailed introduction to the Book of Revelation and how to interpret it properly, a verse by verse commentary on the text, and an explanation of the theological truths which St. John is seeking to convey.

W Brian Shelton, *Quest for the Historical Apostles: Tracing Their Lives and Legacies*, Baker Academic, ISBN 978-0-80109-855-0, £19.99 (e edition also available).

Martin's opinion:

Shelton's book provides a comprehensive account of the lives and legacy of the Apostles. If anybody wants an up to date summary of what we know about the life and labours of the Apostles and how they have been viewed down the centuries then this is now the book to which to turn. It is scholarly and yet accessible and does a fine job of separating history from legend without lapsing into unnecessary historical scepticism. It also helps us to understand that the way in which the Apostles were subsequently remembered in the Church also forms part of their continuing legacy and is therefore something that needs to be taken seriously. A fine piece of work that should be widely read.

Overview:

As part of his earthly ministry Jesus called twelve people to form his inner circle of disciples. After Judas betrayed Jesus and took his own life, St. Matthias was chosen by lot to join this group of people and in due time St. Paul was called by Jesus to become its thirteenth member. These thirteen men, the Apostles, were the group to whom Jesus entrusted the task of leading and teaching the Church. This role means that they were among the most important people who have ever lived and yet most Christians know surprisingly little about them or how they fulfilled the ministry that Jesus gave them.

W Brian Shelton, an expert on the history of the Early Church, seeks to combat this ignorance in his new book *Quest for the Historical Apostles*. As he explains in his Introduction, his book seeks to fill the gap which currently exists in books about the Apostle:

The stories and contributions of the apostles provide an important entrée to church history and thus should be available to a wider audience. The episodes of their lives and legacies are curious and valuable to many Christians. But books about the apostles are commonly written for a popular audience, focusing on personality analysis and quick summaries of their final ministry and death places, while analyses of their legacies are often limited to background information in biblical commentaries solely related to epistles bearing their name. Historically sound books on the topic are often obscure, produced by minor or confessional publishers. A recent, single, comprehensive work is not available as a historical assessment of both the lives and the legacies of the apostles in church history.

As he further explains, his book looks both at the primary and secondary historical sources for the lives of Apostles, but also considers the way that the Apostles have subsequently been viewed and represented in the tradition of the Church.

This work takes on the legends and legacies of the apostles from the New Testament, extant primary source material, contemporary veneration practices remaining from lost information, and secondary research theories. At the same time, our historical knowledge of the apostles is limited to a dispersed set of sources, so the contemporary images of the apostles are as significant as the discernment of their ancient stories. This book combines the historical data with iconic and theological developments concerning the apostles in the immediate and the distant generations that followed.

A chapter is devoted to each of the thirteen apostles in turn, beginning with St. Peter and ending with St. Paul. Each chapter adopts a fivefold approach to the study of the apostle concerned:

... (1) biblical sources, with brief interpretation, will provide information on each apostle. Next, (2) extra biblical early Christian sources will reveal a range of meritorious or legendary material about the biography of an apostle. Here, judicious treatment of legends includes assessing each source, determining the viability of its claims through correspondence with biblical and extra biblical sources, and measuring the permanent influence of the stories. (3) A synthesis of the overall image of each apostle will be established, more or less congruent with the impression of him perpetuated through time in the life of the church, but hopefully more

expansive. (4) Symbolic analysis will explain the permanent representations of the life or contribution of the apostle. Finally, (5) a report on the possible sites of the apostle's tomb will be provided.

A final chapter entitled 'The Discovery' provides an 'overall conclusion on the evidence discovered.'

Commendations:

Bryan Litfin declares:

'Just as there have been quests for the historical Jesus, so now Shelton leads us on a quest for the historical core within the many apostolic legends. More than just a work of scholarship, this book takes readers by the hand and guides us through the minefield of ancient mythmaking to help us meet the actual disciples of Christ, the real men who walked with the Savior and sat at his feet. Never gullible or credulous, yet never unconcerned about the edification of the church, Shelton gives us the bottom line when it comes to the apostles: their actual historical biographies and their enduring significance for today.'

Simon Vibert, *The Perpetual Battle: The World, the Flesh and the Devil*, Christian Focus, ISBN 978-1-52710--149-4, £7.99 (e edition also available).

Martin's opinion:

The Perpetual Battle is an excellent, accessible, introduction to a vital topic. As Vibert argues, Christians need to understand that they are in war and need to know how to conduct this war effectively. This book will help with both. It will be equally useful for both private and group study and would make a good basis for a sermon series. Highly recommended.

Overview:

Simon Vibert was until recently the Vice Principal and Director of the School of Preaching at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, and is now the Vicar of Christ Church, Virginia Water. His new book, which takes its inspiration from earlier works such as William Gurnall's *The Christian in Complete Armour*, C S Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters* and John White's *The Fight*, is a 'training manual' designed to prepare Christians to fight more effectively against the three forces that wage war against their relationship with God – the world, the flesh and the devil.

As Vibert explains in his Introduction, the book has 'arisen out of an observation and a conviction.'

The observation is that spiritual warfare is a subject which is rarely referred to in sermons:

I rarely hear sermons about discipline, dogged determination, perseverance, conflict or active spiritual warfare in the churches I attend. Yes, of course, I am grateful to be reminded that God accepts me in Christ, just as I am; I am glad that preachers remind me that the Holy Spirit gives me assurance that I am God's child. All true! But I also need reminding that being a Christian is not a panacea for an easy time on this earth. Dead fish feel no pain and float downstream. It is only living fish that swim against the tide. I think that I, and other Christians, need to hear again the tough call to discipleship, such as the one that comes from our Lord: that we are called to deny ourselves daily, take up our cross and follow Him (see Luke 9:23). Only people who are expecting suffering to the point of death carry a cross. Indeed the very word 'disciple' has at its root the idea of being a martyr.

The conviction is that this is a subject which the Church needs to address:

My conviction is that the Church will be a lot healthier if it preaches this message faithfully. The Christian gospel is a call to conscription, to serve and follow King Jesus. It will involve a spiritual battle, and His mission is for the conquest (in the sense of a positive campaign) of the whole world under His authority (hence The Great Commission of Matt. 28:18–20). Suffering and trouble should not be a surprise to us, but we need to be encouraged that God is committed to this war, and will provide us with all the resources we need to be His soldiers and servants. We need the rallying rhetoric of a Churchill in our pulpits, preaching a Christian message for today's believers!

In the light of this observation and conviction, the purpose of the book, he says, is to 'help equip a new generation of disciples, active in this world, aware of its subtly persuasive power, and doing battle with the flesh and the Devil.'

The book is in three sections, which look in turn at fighting against devil, the flesh and finally the world. Each of these sections is also divided into three sections, which consider what the Bible has to say about the topic in question, what we can learn from previous Christian writers and what the practical lessons are for Christian discipleship today. The book concludes with a chapter summarising its argument entitled 'Kingdom living in alien land.'

Commendations:

Clayton Croy has written:

'A war is being waged, a war against an internal foe, an external foe, and an ultimate foe. If Christians fail to realize that, we will find ourselves casualties on the battlefields of personal discipleship, cultural skirmishes, and cosmic conflict. This book is a call to arms and a strategy manual. Read it, equip yourself, and fight the good fight.'

Martyn and Hannah Whittock, *The Vikings: From Odin to Christ*, Lion Hudson, ISBN 978-0-74598-018-8, £9.99 (e edition also available).

Martin's opinion:

The conversion of the Vikings was a significant part of the fulfilment of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19 to 'make disciples of all nations.' It is a story that deserves to be told and the Whittocks tell it in a way that reflects up-to-date scholarship, but is also accessible to the non-specialist. This is a book that will of interest to anyone who wants to know more about the Vikings or who wants to understand how Scandinavia, Russia and the Atlantic islands came to Christ. All Christians should want to know the story of how God has acted in the history of the nations and *The Vikings: From Odin to Christ* fills in part of this story.

Overview:

As Martyn and Hannah Whittock note in their new book on the history of the Vikings:

Today, if one asked a modern citizen of the USA or Canada to name the first Christian buried in North America, they might come up with the name of one of the sailors who accompanied the voyage of Christopher Columbus in 1492. If they couldn't think of a name, they would probably suggest that such a person must have accompanied that voyage or one soon afterwards. They might think the first Christian born in North America was either a Spanish colonist or a *Mayflower* settler, and the first native American baptized as a Christian would be someone converted during the Spanish settlement in the Caribbean. Or perhaps they might jump forward in time and name Pocahontas, who converted to Christianity in Virginia in the early seventeenth century.

It is, they say:

....highly unlikely that anybody would suggest that the answer to the first question is Thorvald Erikson, brother of Leif the Lucky. Or that the answer to the second question is Snorri Thorfinnson, the child of Thorfinn Karlsefni and Gudrid Thorbjornsdittir, who had sailed to North America from Brattahild on Greenland. Or that the answer to the third question is two skraeling [native American] children, captured on Markland by the companions of Thorfinn Karlsefni and Gudrid Thorbjornsdittir.

The fact that people are very unlikely to know these correct answers points to the main reason why the Whittocks have written their book. All the individuals named in these answers were Vikings and most people are ignorant about the Christian history of the Vikings. The common perception of the Vikings, fed by books, films and TV shows, is that they were bloodthirsty pagans worshipping gods such as Odin and Thor who attacked Christian countries, destroyed churches and pillaged monasteries.

There is some truth in this picture, but the bigger truth, which the Whittocks seek to get across in their book, is that during the period from the eighth to the twelfth centuries the Vikings changed. They converted to Christianity, of either the Western Catholic, or the Orthodox, variety, and either assimilated into existing Christian states or formed Christian states of their own. By the twelfth century they regarded themselves, and were regarded by others, as an integral part of the Christian world.

As the Whittocks put it in their introduction:

We are seeking in this book to correct the over-emphasis in popular culture on the Oden-worshipping warriors of film and fiction. That is why it is entitled *The Vikings: From Odin to Christ*. While rape and pillaging dominate the popular image, rulers such as Harald Bluetooth of Denmark, Olaf Trygvason of Norway, Cnut the Great (of Denmark and England), William of Normandy, Olof Skotkonung of Sweden and Sigurd the Crusader of Norway (to name just a few) would all have seen themselves as part of mainstream European civilization. In contrast to twenty-first century pluralism, they saw only one way to achieve that: Christianity. This book looks at why they felt this way and how it impacted on their rule and the lives of their subjects – alongside the experiences of countless nameless individuals who converted to Christianity.

The book, which is complete with a timeline, a map of the Viking world, a list of key people and a glossary, tells the story of the conversion of the Vikings chronologically. It starts off with the story of the conversion of the Vikings in England, Ireland and Normandy. It then looks at the establishment of Christian Viking kingdoms in Scandinavia and the role played by the Vikings in establishing an Orthodox Christian kingdom in Russia. Next it looks at the expansion of the Viking world across the North Atlantic and into what is now North America. Finally it considers the Viking rulers of the Orkneys, Shetlands and Western Isles before finishing by looking at the nature of the Viking world in the mid twelfth century.

Commendations:

Ryan Lavelle declares:

‘This is a stimulating and accessible approach to the Viking Age. Focusing on Vikings as Christian rulers and their followers opens up the question of just what we mean when we think of ‘Vikings’. Violent barbarians of legend have their place in this book but the authors look deeper at what it meant to live and prosper in early medieval societies, taking the ‘end’ of the Viking Age beyond where it is often assumed to be and ensuring that the story is told in terms which make it a truly international one.’