

Latimer Trust

Monthly Reading List – April 2019

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
Robin Aitken	<i>The Noble Liar: How and Why the BBC Distorts the News to Promote a Liberal Agenda</i>	Orthodox Christians need to read this in order to understand that the BBC's increasing marginalisation of Christianity and its opposition to traditional Christian sexual ethics are not accidental.
Bruce Ashford and Heath Thomas	<i>The Gospel of Our King – Bible, Worldview, and the Mission of Every Christian</i>	This book is both an excellent introduction to the biblical story and to the nature of Christian mission. It gives a clear orthodox Christian answer to the question of what human beings are for.
Michael Cassidy	<i>Footprints in the African Sand: My Life and Times</i>	This book is important not simply as a first-hand account of the growth of African Enterprise and the eventual overthrow of Apartheid, but as a witness to what Jesus has done, and can do, through the life of someone dedicated to his service.
Jesse Couenhoven	<i>Predestination – A Guide for the Perplexed</i>	Recommended for theological students, clergy and theologically educated members of the laity.
Elaine Heath	<i>Healing the Wounds of Sexual Abuse</i>	This is a book which needs to be widely read. Heath's book highlights the Bible's resources for healing.
Daniel J Mahoney	<i>The Idol of Our Age: How the Religion of Humanity Subverts Christianity</i>	This is a dense work of Christian philosophy which requires concentrated study if it is to be properly understood. However, it is an important work which Christians should take the time and effort to read.
Peter Marshall	<i>Heretics and Believers</i>	Marshall's book helps us in the process of understanding and it should be standard reading for anyone seeking to make sense of the English Reformation.
Jacob Shatzer	<i>Transhumanism and the Image of God: Today's Technology and the Future of Christian Discipleship</i>	This is an important book that all thinking Christians ought to read in order to understand the way in which our culture is heading and how we should respond.
Brian J Tabb	<i>All Things New – Revelation as Canonical Capstone</i>	Anyone who is called to teach or preach on Revelation should take a look at this book as should anyone who simply wants to understand Revelation better.
Robert Wilken	<i>Liberty in the Things of God: The Christian Origins of Religious Freedom</i>	Wilken's book is well worth reading by anyone who wants to understand the historical roots of the concern for religious freedom enshrined in documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights.

Robin Aitken, *The Noble Liar: How and Why the BBC Distorts the News to Promote a Liberal Agenda*, Biteback Books, ISBN 978-1-78590-349-6, £12.99 (e edition also available).

Overview:

Robin Aitken is a former BBC reporter and journalist who spent twenty-five years working across all levels within the Corporation, from local radio to the Today programme. The basic question he addresses in his new book is:

.... why there is such a gulf between the world as the media presents it, and the world as most ordinary people experience it. Why is it that so many people find no echo of their own opinions in the big media outlets that serve them?

In order to answer this question, he argues, we need to look closely at the ethos and influence of the BBC. This is because:

The BBC, by a very large margin, is the most important media organisation in the country, and to understand what has gone wrong, we need to examine this mighty institution in close detail.

In Aitken's view there are 'certain obvious biases' in the BBC's news coverage, such as its naked hostility to President Trump and the Hungarian leader Viktor Orban, its failure to challenge the theories behind radical feminism, and its consistent down playing of the difficult topic of the place of Islam within Western society.

The reason for these biases, he contends, is that the BBC has developed a corporate ethos that is opposed to social conservatism and unfailingly supportive of liberal political and social causes and the claims of victimisation put forward by feminists and by those claiming to speak for ethnic and sexual minorities.

The title of his book, he writes,

.... draws on a concept originated in Plato's Republic; a 'noble lie' is a myth or an untruth, knowingly propagated by an elite, in order to promote and maintain social harmony or advance an agenda. The BBC prides itself on being a 'truth teller': its hard-won, worldwide reputation is built on the foundation stone of audience trust. But what 'truth' is the BBC telling? It is the contention of this book that the BBC, along with its media and establishment allies, has become the vehicle for the propagation of a series of noble lies in pursuit of a political agenda.

In other words, the BBC does not necessarily seek simply to portray the world as it is. Rather, it knowingly presents a certain biased picture of the world in order to change the world in a particular liberal direction.

Martin's opinion:

This is a book that orthodox Christians need to read in order to understand that the BBC's increasing marginalisation of Christianity and its opposition to traditional Christian sexual ethics are not accidental. Instead they are a sign that, as Aitken puts it in chapter 5 of his book, the BBC has become 'apostate.' Having originally had a Christian ethos, its prevailing ideology now has no place for the expression of orthodox Christian belief in terms of either theology or ethics. Clergy and other Christian leaders need to alert Christians to this reality and this book will provide them with the information to help them do that.

Commendations:

David Roberstson has written:

The Noble Liar by Robin Aitken is my book of the year, so far, and I doubt whether any book will overtake it. It is a stunning insight from a former BBC journalist and executive – who has 25 years' experience of the organisation. If you want to understand what is going on in our culture, *The Noble Liar* is essential reading.'

Bruce Ashford and Heath Thomas, *The Gospel of Our King – Bible, Worldview, and the Mission of Every Christian*, Baker Academic, ISBN 978-0-80104-903-3, £14.99 (e edition also available).

Overview:

Bruce Ashford is Professor of Theology and Culture at South Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in the United States. Heath Thomas is Professor of Old Testament at Oklahoma Baptist University, also in the United States.

Their new book from Baker Academic answers the fundamental question raised by the American poet Wendell Berry 'What are people for?' For them, this is a fundamental question because only after 'we understand the *purpose* of people can we begin to explore responsible human *action* in our world.'

Their answer to Berry's question about the purpose of human existence is that:

....the world exists, you and I exist, *for the King*. This answer draws us to identify both the purpose of humanity and what counts as responsible action in the world.

Unlike monarchs in western societies today, this king is not just a figurehead or symbol:

The King we discuss in this book *does* hold real power. More to the point, this King holds the entirety of the universe together, imbuing it with wonder and significance. And knowing and loving this King enables us to discover the wonder and purpose of life and how to live well in the world. So if we want to come to grips with life, its purpose and meaningful action in the world, we must get to know this King.

The way we know this king, they declare, is through the Bible. This is because:

The Bible tells the story of the King. It reveals that the King is God and tells the story of his actions in regard to the world. It is a true story. From it, we can come to know and love the King and find purpose for our lives.

In the first four chapters of their book Thomas and Heath outline the biblical story from God's creation of the world, through his redemption of the world from sin and death, to his final renewal and restoration of creation through Christ at the end of time. In the fifth chapter they then provide 'an exposition of the Christian worldview and gospel in light of the biblical story.'

In the final four chapters of the book they go on to explore the character of Christian mission in the light of the biblical story and the worldview and gospel contained within it. In these chapters they argue that Christian mission is 'theological' because it 'centers on the God of Jesus Christ.' It is 'social' in that it 'involves interaction with other people made in the image of God' in both word and deed so that they too can come to know God. It is also 'deeply and pervasively cultural' in the sense that it both engages with and must seek to shape the various cultures in which people live. Finally, it is 'global' in scope in obedience to Christ's command 'to take the gospel to the nations.'

Martin's opinion:

This book is both an excellent introduction to the biblical story and an excellent introduction to the nature of Christian mission. In both ways it gives a clear orthodox Christian answer to the question of what human beings are for. We exist to know and love the God who is our true king and Christian mission is the way that this knowledge and love find their proper expression. This book would make an excellent basis for a sermon series or for study in a home group and would also make a good basic text for a course on mission at a theological college.

Commendations:

Chris Wright declares:

Some expositions of the biblical narrative as the foundation for our Christian worldview lack contemporary application. And some cultural analyses of the idolatries of Western culture lack solid biblical foundations. This book lacks neither. Ashford and Thomas have combined their respective areas of expertise most effectively, giving us a book that is biblically rich, theologically thorough, spiritually insightful, holistically missional and practically relevant. Western Christians today need to become much more rooted in the whole

Bible story as active participants in its great drama. And we need to open our eyes to recognize and renounce the false gods and idols that masquerade within our culture. This book helps us do both.

Michael Cassidy, *Footprints in the African Sand: My Life and Times*, SPCK, ISBN 978-0-28108-101-1, £16.99 (e edition also available).

Overview:

Michael Cassidy is a South African evangelist, writer and church leader who has been a key figure in the growth of the Christian Church in sub-Saharan Africa over the past fifty years.

Footprints in the African Sand is his autobiography. It tells the story of how he was brought up in Lesotho and how, following his conversion while at Cambridge University, he founded African Enterprise in 1961 with the aim of preaching the Christian message in the cities and among the leadership of what was then a rapidly de-colonializing Africa. It records the growth of the work of African Enterprise through the development of ten teams working across the continent and notes how Cassidy has not only preached the Christian message in cities, universities and schools, but has also been involved in many practical projects of compassionate care, social concern and reconciliation.

The book also explains how Cassidy was involved as a Christian in the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa and how he played a major role behind the scenes in the 1994 South African election, a role which enabled the Inkatha Freedom Party to come into the election at the very last minute, thereby averting civil war in Natal and paving the way for the peaceful inauguration of Nelson Mandela as the first president of a post-Apartheid South Africa.

However, as he explains in his Preface, Cassidy's purpose in writing his autobiography has not been simply to record the events he has been involved in and the people he has got to know in the process, interesting those these have been, but primarily to bear testimony to Jesus Christ. In his words:

My testimony is of a weak vessel that the Lord decided to use in a very complicated context to make a difference in it through the power of his Spirit. I have lived through a convulsive and revolutionary period of contemporary history, especially African history, and over the years it has been my privilege to meet and know some exceedingly interesting people.

But of course the most fascinating Person I've ever met and got to know is Jesus Christ. Yes, for sure, meeting and knowing him since October 1955 has been the single most exhilarating and inspirational experience of my life. And for my life and work, the most dominant and pivotal. So my story in the main has him as its major point of intersection, thread and motivation, and my steps have been given and guided by him. Most of them, anyway.

And telling about that is something I do truly want to do. I have been his 'passing guest', as the psalmist calls himself (Psalm 39.12), these more than threescore and 22 years on Planet Earth, and he has hosted me, frail sinner that I am, more graciously and patiently than my wildest deservings. To testify to that experience, that inner soul journey and that adventure of mind and spirit, and to affirm his Amazing Grace and matchless faithfulness does indeed excite me as much as it makes me tremble that I could ever do justice to all I have seen him do and bring forth. But I am open to trying. So yes, I do want to bring testimony – while I yet have time.

Martin's opinion:

This central element of Christian testimony means that this book is important not simply as a first-hand account of the growth of African Enterprise and the eventual overthrow of Apartheid, but as a witness to what Jesus has done, and can do, though the life of someone dedicated to his service. If we are tempted to ask the question 'what difference can one person make?' then *Footsteps in the African Sand* supplies the answer. It tells us that by the grace of God the work of one individual can make a significant difference both now and also for eternity. Highly recommended.

Commendations:

Michael Nazir-Ali comments:

The book shows that redemption can be personal as well as social and that there can be godly resistance to evil which does not fall into the trap of emulating the ways of the oppressors. Michael has been able, in his own life, to overcome the divisions of race, denominations and theological emphasis with simplicity and integrity. I have learnt much from his example. I know that others will too.

Jesse Couenhoven, *Predestination – A Guide for the Perplexed*, T&T Clark, ISBN 978-0-56705-471-5, £18.99 (hardback and e editions also available).

Overview:

Jesse Couenhoven is Assistant Professor of Moral Theology in the Department of Humanities and Augustinian Traditions at Villanova University in the United States. His new book in the T & T Clark 'guide for the perplexed' series is concerned with the doctrine of predestination.

As Couenhoven acknowledges in his introduction:

To modern sensibilities, the doctrine of predestination seems both strange and problematic. Given our scientific progress, our control of nature, and the degree of self-determination available to the citizens of democracies leading the world, it seems odd to claim that matters of ultimate importance may yet be in God's hands. Moreover, it seems unfair to claim that God might bless or curse our lives even if we could not have chosen to make them turn out differently. It would be easy to dismiss this doctrine (like seemingly related talk about fate or astrology) as a relic of an unenlightened past, a day when humanity really was more helpless than it is today.

However, he says, the 'motivating hypothesis' of his book is the conviction that it is in fact 'an act of hubris to dismiss the idea of predestination without studying it more carefully than, in recent times, we have.' In his view:

We ought, at least, to attempt to see what might have attracted great minds throughout history to espouse this doctrine. Then we will be in a better position to consider whether our world is as different from theirs as it can appear to be. Once we give this doctrine more than a cursory glance, it may begin to strike us - at least it has begun to strike me – that it contains a good deal of insight into aspects of the human condition that vary only a little with time.

In order to look at the doctrine of predestination in more detail Couenhoven explores how it has been understood historically by six major figures in the Christian tradition, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin and Barth. In a final chapter entitled 'Predestination: A moderate defence' he then offers his own explanation and defence of the doctrine. He argues that a helpful way to understand it is to look at it in the light of our experiences of love and friendship. Following C S Lewis, he argues that these have a 'gift character' in the sense that they are something which are given to us without our deserving or choosing them. As Couenhoven sees the matter:

In Lewis' appropriation of ancient Christian claims about the gift-character of both our friendships and our romances, we catch a glimpse of the fundamental religious stance of gratitude that the doctrine of predestination is meant to express. The events in our lives that evoke love and appreciation are not fundamentally accidental, but nor are they self-made. They are, instead, a feast, at which God has spread the table. The idea that this feast is not something that we can or should work up for ourselves, suggests that there are goods that it is better to be given than to take for oneself. It may be somewhat easier for us to understand predestination's appeal when we see it from this vantage point. The doctrine does not necessarily express the deterministic conviction that everything happens as God intends. It does, however, affirm that the most important things in life are under God's care in very specific ways. In the midst of many penultimate sorrows, belief in predestination offers the hope that our lives are ultimately in hands more capable than our own.

Martin's opinion:

Anglican Christians are under an obligation to accept the truth that there is such a thing as predestination since its existence is specifically affirmed in Article XVII of the *Thirty Nine Articles*. What Couenhoven's book offers them is a reliable and accessible account of how predestination has been understood by a series of major Christian thinkers and an interesting new way of making sense of the doctrine of predestination today. Not everyone will agree with everything that Couenhoven says, but no one will come away from reading this book without their understanding and appreciation of the doctrine of predestination having been deepened. Recommended for theological students, clergy and theologically educated members of the laity.

Commendations:

Oliver Crisp writes:

Jesse Couenhoven has written a book that really is an illuminating guide for those perplexed by the apparently interminable debate about divine predestination and human freedom. He offers deft and agile commentary on major thinkers in the Christian tradition, and provides a thoughtful (and plausible) constructive account of his own at the end of the book. This is a clear, concise, and rewarding study that should be immediately placed in the hands of all those who doubted something helpful could still be written on this vital theological topic.

Elaine Heath, *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Abuse*, Brazos Press, ISBN 978-1-58743-428-0, £12.99 (hardback, e and audio editions also available).

Overview:

As anyone who has not been living under a rock will know, awareness of the prevalence of sexual abuse is a prominent feature of the time in which we live. As Christians we need to acknowledge the ways in which sexual abuse has been prevalent in the Church and to put structures in place to bring the perpetrators to justice and prevent similar abuse taking place in the future. However, we cannot stop there. We also to do what we can to help those who have been abused to receive healing from God so that they can move forward into a better future.

Elaine Heath's work *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Abuse*, which is an updated edition of a book originally published in 2011, is a resource for those seeking to bring about such healing. Heath is a Methodist theologian who is Professor of Missional and Pastoral Theology at Duke Divinity School in the United States. She is also a survivor of sexual abuse. As she explains in her introduction:

I am one of the women who posted 'me too' on social media. While I did not want to go into detail about the harmful events of my life, like so many others who posted, I wanted to declare publicly that shame, silence, and violence will not have the last word. Healing is possible. A beautiful future is possible for people like us. Moreover, many of us have wisdom and discernment that emerge from our wounds as they heal. We have God-given, powerful insight that the church needs.

As she goes on to say

My healing from sexual abuse has been deeply embedded in my vocational journey as a theologian, pastor, and spiritual companion to others. Because I had the privilege of studying in diverse theological streams – evangelical, mainline Protestant and Catholic – I gradually discovered many treasures from all these traditions that helped to open the Bible's wealth of healing wisdom to me. Over the years I have served in ministry with other survivors, I have witnessed the healing power of the Bible in their lives too.

This book is really grounded in two commitments: first that the Bible can be a powerful source of healing for survivors of abuse, and second, that survivors who are healing have essential theological wisdom that the whole church needs in order to be the people God has called us to be in the world.

Building on these two commitments, Heath's book is an exploration of a range of passages from the Bible 'that have proven to be profoundly healing for myself and other survivors with whom I have journeyed.' In each chapter Heath explores a different way in which material from the Bible speaks to the experiences of those who have suffered abuse and at the end of each chapter she includes 'two sets of reflection questions, one set for survivors and another for companions of survivors, as well as a list of recommended activities.' At the end of the book there is also an extensive list of further resources.

Martin's opinion:

This is a book which needs to be widely read. Much of the reaction of the churches to revelations of sexual abuse has been administrative and disciplinary. This sort of reaction is necessary, but it is not sufficient. There also needs to be proper pastoral care for survivors of abuse that draws on the resources for healing that God gives us in the Bible. Heath's book highlights these resources and by so doing indicates the form that this pastoral care needs to take.

Commendations:

Jaime Clark Soles comments:

Written from the powerful perspective of 'we, the survivors' by a person who is deeply contemplative and able to 'be angry but sin not' regarding the evil of patriarchy and sexual abuse, this book educates, encourages, and empowers individuals and communities. Heath shows us how Jesus, the Bible and the Christian community can (and do) serve as sources of healing and wholeness for survivors (even those abused by people in the church). This book is for everyone – churches, seminaries, small groups, and individuals. It is for survivors themselves and those who journey with survivors. It should be required reading

for every seminary, and it will be on my syllabus. Far from an exercise in theoretical possibilities of wishful thinking, it is an invitation into the sure reality of healing that awaits survivors and those who companion them.

Daniel J Mahoney, *The Idol of Our Age: How the Religion of Humanity Subverts Christianity*, Encounter Books, ISBN 978-1-64177-016-3, £17.99 (e edition also available).

Overview:

Daniel Mahoney is a Roman Catholic scholar who teaches religion, philosophy and politics at Assumption College in the United States. His new book is an essay about the way that all three of these subjects intersect in contemporary culture.

The book's argument is that our culture is dominated by a secular form of religion which Mahoney calls 'humanitarianism.' In this religion human beings are seen as the 'measure of everything' and that which is above man 'is forgotten or taken for granted, if not openly repudiated.' Furthermore Christianity itself has become corrupted by humanitarianism with the result that the Christian faith has been reduced 'to an inordinate concern for 'social welfare,' for the alleviation of poverty and suffering in all its forms.'

Quoting the American writer Graham McAleer, Mahoney contends that humanitarianism is:

'a bold assertion of human sovereignty that necessarily abolishes the sovereignty of the moral object, and therewith God's sovereignty,' It is the self-conscious negation of a natural order of things, an objective hierarchy of moral goods, accessible to human beings through natural reason, conscience and common sense. To live in such a world is to lose one's moral bearings. A cursory reflection shows that humanitarianism subverts Christianity and the moral law and leaves nothing but confusion in their place.

In humanitarianism, Mahoney argues:

...relativism coexists with limitless moralism. This is the most striking feature of the modern 'moral' order. Left-wing humanitarian and 'progressive' churchmen spout on about 'social justice' as if opponents of doctrinaire egalitarianism hate the poor or support social injustice. But they never really tell us what 'social justice' is or what the adjective adds to the noun. The taking of an unborn life is merely a 'choice,' which is, one assumes, completely beyond good and evil. And who can be against free choice? To argue that marriage has some link between the complementarity of men and women and to natural procreation (and is also at the service of the education of new citizens) is somehow to subvert a love which need not respect natural distinctions. And who can be against love? Free choice, autonomous choice, trumps any respect for the directedness of human freedom toward natural ends or purpose, a kind of juvenile existentialism, marked more by farce than by anger, has become the default position of our age.

The Idol of Our Age develops the critique of humanitarianism set out in these quotations, drawing on the work of four Christian thinkers, Orestes Brownson, Aurel Kolnai, Vladimir Soloviev, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn 'who appreciated the full import of both the 'totalitarian' and 'humanitarian' lies long before their contemporaries.' It also critiques aspects of the teaching of Pope Francis, arguing that:

For the first time in the history of the Church, we have a pope who is half-humanitarian and thoroughly blind to the multiple ways in which humanitarian secular religion subverts authentic Christianity. With winks and nods, he challenges the age-old Catholic teaching that there are intrinsic evils that cannot be countenanced by a faithful Christian or any person of good will. In a thousand ways, he sows confusion in the Church and the world.

In two final chapters Mahoney considers:

...the influential German social theorist Jurgen Habermas' plea for a post-national world (an essential element of humanitarian ideology) and how conscience, properly understood, is our portal for recovering 'the sovereignty of the object,' a world where the distinctions between the true and the false, and good and evil, are not merely arbitrary. Reason, as well as revealed faith, gives us access to an order of things. We are not adrift in the world, forced to choose between moral anarchy and nihilistic despair.

Martin's opinion:

The Idol of Our Age is not an easy read. It is a dense work of Christian philosophy which requires concentrated study if it is to be properly understood. However, it is an important work which Christians should take the time and effort to read. This is because it looks in detail at the nature and shortcomings of the humanitarian ideology which now dominates the Western world and the way that it has influenced the thinking of many within the Church. If we are to set forth an authentic Christian moral vision for the contemporary world, we have first to understand the ideology we are called to oppose and how it differs from the Christian world view. Mahoney's work is a valuable contribution to the development of such understanding.

Commendations:

John Sullivan has written:

Following the collapse of the revolutionary projects of the twentieth century, modern governments have generally adopted policies reflecting a gentle and pacifist post-Christian Humanitarianism. This seeming heir to Christianity, however, may be its most subtle enemy. As Daniel Mahoney cogently argues, drawing on European and American thinkers from Orestes Brownson to Alexander Solzhenitsyn, its denial of evil, its hostility to human differences, and its elevation of comfort as the highest good doom it to produce the opposite of what it promises: egalitarian tyranny, coercive bureaucracy in personal relations, the spread of euthanasia and abortion, the collapse of the future, and a growing listlessness in politics, culture, and religion. In matters spiritual, Dr. Mahoney advises, accept no substitutes.

Peter Marshall, *Heretics and Believers*, Yale University Press, ISBN 978-0-30023-458-9, £16.99 (hardback, e and audio editions also available).

Overview:

For many years the standard textbook for students of the English Reformation has been A.G. Dickens' *The English Reformation*. This remains a very valuable study. However, the second edition was published in 1989 and in the thirty years since then historians have continued to study and debate what happened at the English Reformation and why. This means that there has been a need for someone to produce a new textbook which would be a successor to Dickens' and which would reflect the issues that have been raised in this subsequent discussion.

Heretics and Believers by Peter Marshall, Professor of History at the University of Warwick, now meets this need.

The work is in four parts.

Part 1 'Reformations before Reformation' covers the period from 1485–1525. It looks at the nature of late medieval English religion and attempts 'to explain why English society around the turn of the sixteenth century was often convinced of the necessity for 'reformation', but unable to find agreed strategies for implementing it.'

Part 2, 'Separations', 'describes the emergence of the bitter divisions within English Christianity following from two, seemingly unconnected, developments of the 1520s: the reverberations from Martin Luther's protest against papal authority, and the frustrated desire of Henry VIII to secure an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon.' Marshall argues that the 'early and remarkable convergence between these processes' helps to explain both the 'dynamic character, and the instability and incoherence, of the so-called 'Henrician Reformation.'

Part 3, 'New Christianities,' looks at what he calls the 'fitful emergence, after the fluidity and confusion of the early Reformation years, of more confident and enduring patterns of religious identity and solidarity,' According to Marshall, these identities 'were already emerging in the later years of Henry VIII, and continued to solidify through the short but eventful reigns of Edward VI and Mary I, when rival visions of Reformation, political and religious, convulsed the conscience of the nation, and impacted heavily on communities throughout the realm.'

Part 4, 'Unattainable Prizes', covers the reign of Elizabeth I. It describes 'how Protestantism established a powerful political hegemony in England, and began to put down roots in the localities; and how Catholicism, only recently the establishment faith, surmounted threats to its very survival in order to reinvent itself as a vibrant vehicle of dissident expression.' In line with the title of this part it also looks at why 'none of the idealistic programmes of Reformation proclaimed in the later sixteenth century – not even Elizabeth I's own – were ultimately able to triumph.'

The basic contention of Marshall's study is that, contrary to the arguments of some left wing scholars, 'the conflicts of the Reformation were indeed principally about religion; that questions of faith were not merely a convenient covering for more fundamental or 'real' concerns about political power, social domination or economic assets.' He further contends that the Reformation was the result of the conscientious decisions of numerous individuals and that the end result was a pattern of religious diversity which gave a new shape to peoples' sense of their own identity and their relationships with each other and with authority:

... 'the Reformation' was not a mysterious, faceless force, obtruding upon individuals and their communities from somewhere beyond their reckoning. Rather, it was a transformative historical moment enacted by the calculations and decisions, sometimes heroic and sometimes shameful, of innumerable men and women, both great and small, at the centres of high policy-making, and in myriad localities where ordinary people lived.

It was not all about making choices. Compulsion and coercion feature prominently in the narrative that follows, and for many people, much of the time, the sensible choice was to keep their heads down and do as they were told. Nonetheless, over the course of the sixteenth century, and for the first time in securely documented history, everyone in England became acutely aware that the most important questions of human existence were capable of demanding divergent – indeed, mutually incompatible – answers. That fundamentally new dynamic had a momentous impact, on existing patterns of collective allegiance and on

conceptions of individual identity: it redefined people's relationships to both 'vertical' structures of authority and 'horizontal' bonds of community. In a world of plural possibility, even quiet adherence to the status quo was now an act of meaningful affirmation. The English Reformation, and with it the future course of the nation's history, was made by a great multitude of heretics and believers.

Martin's opinion:

Marshall's book is a secular historical study of the English Reformation. It brackets out the question which is most important for the Christian, namely where God was at work in all that took place. This is a question which we need to try to answer, but if we are to do so we have to understand as accurately as possible what actually happened. Marshall's book helps us in this process of understanding and it should be standard reading for anyone seeking to make sense of the English Reformation.

Commendations:

Mark Noll comments, 'In a field crowded with exceptionally able histories, *Heretics and Believers* stands out as a treasure.'

Jacob Shatzer, *Transhumanism and the Image of God: Today's Technology and the Future of Christian Discipleship*, Inter-Varsity Press, ISBN 978-0-83085-250-5, £17.01 (e edition also available).

Overview:

Jacob Shatzer is a Baptist scholar who is Assistant Professor and Associate Dean in the School of Theology and Missions at Union University in the United States. His new book from Inter-Varsity press starts from the premise that we need to avoid what he calls the 'Jetsons fallacy.'

The 1960s American TV show *The Jetsons* envisaged a future in which there was radical technological change (including the existence of intelligent robots), but in which human beings remain just as they are now. According to Shatzer this view of the future is a fallacy 'because radical technological change will radically shape humans as well.' As he sees it:

We are headed into a social order whose most salient new feature may well be the systematic modification of human bodies and minds through increasingly powerful means. The process is already underway today and seems unlikely to slow down in the decades to come.

'Transhumanism' is the name that he gives to the philosophical movement that proposes the use of technology to change what it means to be human. The purpose of his book is to explore transhumanism from a Christian perspective and to look at how it is related to another philosophical movement called 'posthumanism.' According to Shatzer:

Posthumanism argues that there is a next stage in human evolution. In this stage, humans will become posthuman because of our interaction with and connection to technology. Transhumanism, on the other hand, promotes values that contribute to this change. Transhumanism aims at posthumanism, and both are based to a large degree on the potential offered by technology. In a way, transhumanism provides the thinking and the method for moving towards posthumanism. They share a common value system, and in this book I will refer primarily to transhumanism but also occasionally to posthumanism because of this connection. Understanding the values of transhumanism is not an end in itself. Rather, I want to consider how our current use of technology might prepare us for such a future – whether we currently like it or not.

Shatzer's book is in two halves.

In the first five chapters he explains what transhumanism is and how it leads towards a posthumanist goal. He explains in detail the history and goal of transhumanism and then looks at 'morphological freedom' (the idea that we can use technology to become whatever we wish to be), 'augmented reality' (the use of technology to transcend our current human limitations) and 'artificial intelligence' and 'mind uploading' (using technology to move human beings away entirely from their dependence on biology).

In the final five chapters he explores how our relationship with technology affects our sense of place, our relationships with others, and our self-image. He also suggests ways in which Christians can and should resist the impact of technology by valuing the God given biological nature of human existence, and by deliberately prizing and developing direct personal (rather than technological) contact with others through creating times of personal fellowship, sharing meals, engaging in storytelling and coming together for face-to-face acts of worship. He also recommends incorporating 'practices into our lives that give us space away from and formation in the face of encroaching immersive technology' primarily by practicing a Sabbath rest in which we deliberately refrain from the use of such technology.

Shatzer is not arguing that Christians should simply reject technological advances *per se*. What he is arguing is that Christians should understand the nature of the technological advances that are shaping our world and where these might take us in the future and that they should be wise about how the use of technology relates to authentic Christian discipleship. In his words: 'part of responsible, wise, faithful use of tools is analyzing the ways that certain tools shape us to see the world in certain ways, and then to ask whether those ways are consistent with the life of a disciple of Christ.'

In particular Shatzer warns Christians against the desire to view the body as expendable: 'The doctrine of the incarnation shows us why full, embodied humanity is the goal, and the importance of this doctrine warns us of danger in embracing a version of humanity that rejects 'in the body.' Jesus' physical presence is foundational.'

Martin's opinion:

This is an important book that all thinking Christians ought to read in order to understand the way in which our culture is heading and how we should respond. As one reviewer has put it 'The first step to recovering Christian discipleship in a technological age is recognizing how technology shapes us. Shatzer gets us on the path to do so.'

Commendations:

Derek Schuurman notes:

The adage that 'we shape our tools, and thereafter our tools shape us' takes on a new meaning with transhumanism. In this timely book, Shatzer explores how the liturgies of certain technologies can nudge us unwittingly toward a transhuman future and recommends practices that remind us what it truly means to be human.

Brian J Tabb, *All Things New – Revelation as Canonical Capstone*, IVP Academic, ISBN 978-0-83082-649-0, £21.68 (e edition also available).

Overview:

Brian J. Tabb is academic dean and associate professor of Biblical Studies at Bethlehem College and Seminary in the United States. His new book in the IVP New Studies in Biblical Theology series is about the interpretation of the Book of Revelation.

As he explains in his introduction, some writers on Revelation have argued that we should read Revelation 'in the light of current world events.' This approach is the one taken, for example, by Hal Lindsey in his best seller *The Late Great Planet Earth* and by Tim La Haye in his *Left Behind* novels. They see Revelation as pointing forward to events that will take place in twentieth or twenty first centuries.

According to Tabb:

This approach rightly stresses that Jesus will return and that God will fulfil his ancient promises. However, confident predictions and analyses by many so-called 'prophecy experts' often miss the mark and appear far removed from the late first-century context of John and his readers.

On the other hand, 'biblical scholars commonly emphasize that Revelation must be read strictly in the light of its historical context.' This means, for instance, that the 'beast' in Revelation 13 'is not an antichrist figure that persecutes the saints in the distant future but the Roman Empire that presently promotes idolatrous emperor worship and economic oppression in the late first century.'

According to Tabb:

Scholars who adopt this historical-critical approach rightly relate Revelation to John and his first readers, but some stop short of reading the book as the capstone of Christian Scripture to be applied and lived out by believers today.

As he sees it: 'neither the strictly futurist approach nor the historical-critical approach adequately demonstrates the ongoing vital relevance of the Apocalypse for the contemporary church.' What he suggests instead is an approach to Revelation which emphasises the importance of its '*canonical context*.'

In Tabb's view, when read in the context of the whole Biblical canon:

.... the Apocalypse presents itself as the climax of biblical prophecy that shows how various Old Testament prophecies and patterns find their consummation in the present and future reign of Jesus Christ, who decisively defeats his foes, saves his people and restores all things. As biblical prophecy, Revelation not only foretells the future but also calls for present obedience to God's revealed truth.

In addition he says:

.... the book's symbolic visions shape believers' world views around what is true, good and beautiful according to God's revealed standards and motivate them to live counter culturally in the world as faithful witnesses who 'follow the Lamb wherever he goes' (Rev. 14:4). Revelation is not a riddle to be decoded by experts or marginalized by those in the pews. It is a book – indeed, the *final* book – of Christian Scripture meant to decode our reality, capture our imaginations and master our lives with the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

In his book as a whole Tabb develops this argument by looking in turn at what Revelation has to say about 'The Triune God,' 'Worship and Witness,' 'Judgement, Salvation and Restoration,' and 'The Word of God.'

Under these four big headings Tabb looks in detail at various aspects of the theology of Revelation. For example, under 'The Triune God' he looks at 'The Lion and the Lamb: Jesus the reigning, returning king' and expounds what

Revelation teaches us about Jesus as 'The Son of Man,' 'The faithful witness,' 'The messianic ruler,' 'The slain Lamb' and 'The first and the last.'

Martin's opinion:

This book is a useful introduction to the theology of the Book of Revelation, that is scholarly without being over technical. It rightly acknowledges that Revelation does point forward towards the ultimate future when Jesus comes in judgement to restore all things, but it also rightly stresses that Revelation tells us that God rules the world now and teaches us what it means to live as Christians today in obedience to God's word. Anyone who is called to teach or preach on Revelation should take a look at this book as should anyone who simply wants to understand Revelation better.

Commendations:

Don Carson has written:

Not only does [Dr Tabb] write with clarity and deceptive simplicity, but *what* he writes will prove enduring. He belongs to that biblical-theological school which, without forcing the evidence, eagerly probes how the trajectories of Scripture come together in Scripture's last book. As Richard Bauckham has taught us, the Book of Revelation is the very culmination of prophecy -- and Dr Tabb is eager to work this out. In a book like Revelation, full of symbols that have little resonance with our world, Dr Tabb brings them to life once again. And he does this in a context that ties the themes of the book to some foundational Christian convictions. Take, and read.

Robert Wilken, *Liberty in the Things of God: The Christian Origins of Religious Freedom*, Yale University Press, ISBN 978-0-30022-663-8, £19.92 (e edition also available).

Overview:

Robert Louis Wilken is Professor Emeritus of the History of Christianity at the University of Virginia in the United States. In his new book published by Yale University Press he argues that it is not the case, as is often now thought, that ideas of religious freedom had their origin in the secular thinkers of the Enlightenment. Instead ideas of religious freedom have their origin in the teaching of Christian thinkers from the early centuries of the Church.

Wilken writes that:

Religious freedom rests on a simple truth: religious faith is an inward disposition of the mind and heart and for that reason cannot be coerced by external force.

This truth, he says:

...was stated for the first time by Tertullian of Carthage, a Christian writer who lived in North Africa in the early third century. Tertullian said: 'It is only just and a privilege inherent in human nature that every person should be able to worship according to his own convictions; the religious practice of one person neither harms nor helps another. It is not part of religion to coerce religious practice, for it is by choice not coercion that we should be led to religion.'

For Tertullian and other Christian apologists of this era, religion was a matter of both individual conscience and corporate practice. Because it was a matter of individual conscience, religion had to be chosen not coerced, a choice made "only by words, not by blows," as Lactantius, a later Christian apologist, put it.

Early Christian apologists such as Tertullian lived at a time when Christians were a persecuted and powerless, although growing, minority within the Roman Empire. However, most of Western Christian history has taken place with Christians as the powerful majority. The bulk of Wilken's book describes the long period between the conversion of Constantine in the early fourth century and the dawn of the Enlightenment in the late 17th century) during which Christians followed the habits of the pagan Romans by attempting to use the power of government to pursue religious ends.

However, contends Wilken, even during this period the earlier Christian tradition was not forgotten. Christian groups on the wrong side of state power continued to use the arguments for religious freedom pioneered by Tertullian and the early Christian apologists. They appealed to conscience to limit government's power over a community's religious practice.

For example, at the Diet of Worms in 1521 Martin Luther famously explained to the Catholic authorities of the Holy Roman Empire his refusal to recant in these words: 'My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe.' Four years later in Nuremberg, when Lutheran magistrates tried to stop Franciscan nuns from practicing their Catholicism, Abbess Caritas von Pirckheimer wrote of the magistrates, "They knew very well that we had always obeyed them before in all temporal things. But in what concerned our soul, we could follow nothing but our own conscience."

What these examples show, say Wilken, was that there was a continuous tradition within Christian thought that said the state had no right to overstep its limits by forcing members of religious communities to violate their conscience by going against what they believed to be the will of God.

This tradition stemmed from Tertullian and other early Christian apologists and continued to operate as such throughout Christendom whenever the powers that be overstepped their boundaries by forgetting Jesus' distinction between the authority of Caesar and the authority of God (Mark 12:17).

It follows therefore, that when John Locke and other early Enlightenment figures began to argue for first toleration and then freedom of religion, they were not in fact saying something new. They were in fact simply developing a position that had an ancient history within Christian thought.

In Wilken's words:

It was early Christian teachers who first set forth ideas of the freedom of the human person in matters of religion; it was Christian thinkers who contended that conscience must be obedient only to God; and it was the dualism of political and spiritual authority in Christian history that led to the idea that civil government and religious belief must be kept separate. The process by which the meditations of the past become the certainties of the present is long and circuitous. But by the eighteenth century ideas on religious liberty advanced by earlier thinkers had become the property of all.

Martin's opinion:

Wilken's book is well worth reading by anyone who wants to understand the historical roots of the concern for religious freedom enshrined in documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights. Wilken shows that respect for individual conscience on matters of religion is something that is Christian in origin. In an age when this truth is often overlooked and when religious freedom is under attack around the world this is a part of the Christian tradition that needs to be proclaimed afresh and Wilken's work helps to provide a historical grounding for this proclamation.

Commendations:

Robert George comments:

'A vibrant picture of where leading ideas about religious freedom came from and how they emerged.'