



## Latimer Trust Monthly Reading List - August 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
Craig Allert	<i>Early Church Readings of Genesis One</i>	This book does the modest, but still important, job of reminding us that we need to read the Fathers on their own terms when thinking about what they can teach us on this matter.
Richard Belcher	<i>Finding favour in the sight of God: A Theology of Wisdom Literature</i>	This study will be very helpful to students at university and theological college approaching these books for the first time. It will also be helpful to clergy and others who are called to preach on these books, or teach about them.
Rosaria Butterfield	<i>The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World</i>	No one can properly evade her challenge to consider how much we are willing to share our lives, our homes and our possessions so that lost men and women may know God and grow into his likeness. An uncomfortable book, but one that everyone should read and ponder
Richard Coekin	<i>The Reluctant Evangelist</i>	This book is a helpful resource for encouraging people to engage in evangelism. It forms a good basis for a sermon series or for study in a home group setting.
Benjamin Conner	<i>Disabling Mission, Enabling Witness</i>	This book should be of interest to all those with responsibility for shaping the Church's teaching and practice.
Paul Hinlicky	<i>Luther for Evangelicals: A Re-introduction</i>	This book will be of interest to Evangelicals who want to know more about what Luther taught and what his teaching can contribute to a renewal of Evangelicalism in our day.
Christopher Holmes	<i>The Lord Is Good: Seeking The God Of The Psalter</i>	Those who are prepared to persevere will be richly rewarded by being challenged to think hard about what God is like and how what God is like shapes his actions and our existence as his creatures.
Scott McKnight	<i>The Hum of Angels</i>	It can be recommended to anyone, whether clergy or laity, who want to discover more about angels for themselves or want guidance in teaching others about them.
Olli-Pekka Vainio	<i>Cosmology in Theological Perspective</i>	For the most part this is an accessible read that theological students, ministers and ordinary lay people will all find useful.
Peter Walker	<i>The Story of the Holy Land: A visual history</i>	This would be ideal as an introduction to the history of the Holy Land for older children or for adults who know nothing about the subject. Highly recommended.

**Craig Allert, *Early Church Readings of Genesis One*, Inter-Varsity Press, ISBN 978-0-83085-201-7, £28.30.**

### **Martin's opinion:**

This is an important book that offers a properly contextual reading of what St. Basil, St. Augustine and other Fathers wrote about the creation account in Genesis 1. It will be of interest both to students of the Fathers and to those interested in the question of how we should understand Genesis 1. This book does not, and does not intend to, settle the question of how to interpret the meaning of Genesis 1 and how what it says relates to the findings of modern science. What it does do is the more modest, but still important, job of reminding us that we need to read the Fathers on their own terms when thinking about what they can teach us on this matter. It also helpfully points us to the key issue raised by St. Augustine about how we are to understand the relation between God's eternity and our time when thinking about God's creative activity.

### **Overview:**

Craig Allert is the Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University in Langley, British Columbia in Canada. As he explains in his introduction, the purpose of his new book on the Patristic interpretation on Genesis 1 is to:

...give a window into the strange new world of the church fathers and how they understood creation themes in Genesis 1. I say 'strange new world' because for many evangelicals it is just that. Most have heard of the church fathers and some have heard the names Augustine and Origen. In rare cases appeal is even made to them in support of an argument. But this is usually as far as it goes.

As Allert goes on to say, this lack of knowledge of the Fathers among Evangelicals becomes problematic:

...when trusted sources are irresponsible in how they appeal to the church fathers. This is precisely what is happening in some creation science appropriation of patristic sources. Rather than use the deliberate and patient approach necessary to this strange new world, creation science advocates decontextualize and proof-text the early leaders of the church to show that they read Scripture and understood Genesis 1 no differently than they themselves do today. Rather than trying to understand the Fathers on their own terms, as pastors and churchmen, they are treated as ammunition in a battle they knew nothing about. To treat the Fathers so irresponsibly is a disservice both to them and the church they served. Further, it fails to accurately discern how we may grasp our own debt to them and properly appropriate them to inform our contemporary Christianity.

In his book Allert seeks both to challenge this irresponsible reading of the Fathers by writers for organisations such as Answers in Genesis, the Institute for Creation Research and Creation Ministries International and to model a better approach to reading what the Fathers have to say.

Allert's book is in eight chapters.

Chapter 1, 'Who are the Church Fathers, and why should I care?' outlines what Allert means when he talks about the Church Fathers.

Chapter 2, 'How not to read the Fathers,' provides several examples of popular writers on the issue of Creation who claim the church fathers read Genesis one as referring to six literal days. He argues that such writers tend to misunderstand and therefore misrepresent the Fathers, such as St. Basil, to whom they refer.

Chapter 3, 'What does 'literal' mean? Patristic exegesis in context?' discusses what the Fathers meant when they talked about the 'literal' exegesis of the biblical text, and argues that it is a mistake to assume that a Patristic writer either read the text literally or allegorically since they often noted the 'plain' sense of the text and discussed its spiritual or 'allegorical' meaning.

Chapter 4, 'Basil the literalist' argues that that in his ninth sermon on Genesis 1 St. Basil did not in fact interpret the days of Genesis 1 as six literal days. Like earlier Fathers such as Origen he in fact interpreted these days symbolically rather than literally.

Chapters 5, 'Creation out of nothing,' and 6, 'The days of Genesis,' argues that when the Fathers argued for the

doctrine of *creation ex nihilo* and discussed the character of the days in Genesis 1 they gave these terms theological meaning rather than seeing Genesis as giving what we would call a 'scientific' account of the creation of the world.

Chapter 7, 'Augustine on 'in the beginning'' examines how St. Augustine saw God as creating time along with the world rather than creating the world in time and therefore rejected the idea that creation took place 'in a time measured way.' Chapter 8 'On being like Moses,' then summarises Allert's argument.

#### **Commendations:**

Christopher Hall writes:

'Navigating the first chapter of Genesis, especially in light of present-day controversies, is a tricky business. Craig Allert's presentation of early Christian readings of this text will help readers to understand ancient perspectives and their applicability to present concerns.'

**Richard Belcher, *Finding favour in the sight of God: A Theology of Wisdom Literature*, Apollos, ISBN 978-1-78359-714-7, £14.99 (e edition also available).**

**Martin's opinion:**

This study will be very helpful to students at university and theological college approaching these books for the first time. It will tell them what they need to know to begin to understand these books and why they are important. It will also be helpful to clergy and others who are called to preach on these books, or teach about them, and who want a fresh perspective on what they have to say and how they point forward to Christ. If you want wisdom about wisdom then this book will give it to you.

**Overview:**

Richard Belcher is Old Testament professor at the Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina in the United States. He has written a number of books on the wisdom literature in the Old Testament and his new book in the New Studies in Biblical Theology series is a study of the three main wisdom books of the Old Testament, Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes.

As Belcher explains in his Preface, the Old Testament wisdom literature 'is no longer the 'orphan child' it was in the distant past. There has been an explosion in the interest in wisdom, so that now many works are available to explain it.' Because this is the case, he says, there is 'every opportunity for people to 'Get wisdom: get insight' (Prov. 4:5).' However, looking at the world of the twenty-first century 'it seems apparent that the practical sensibilities that come from wisdom are found in very few places, which means that wisdom literature is needed now more than ever.'

In his view, the three books of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes are key to understanding the Bible's teaching about wisdom.

Proverbs 'lays the proper foundation for the education of the next generation. It gives parents practical guidelines for helping their children walk in the way of wisdom grounded in the fear of the Lord.' It also 'helps the wise increase in learning.' Job 'wrestles with suffering and the sovereignty of God. It reminds us that we are not in control of this world, or even of our own lives, so we must trust a sovereign God to work out his purposes.' Ecclesiastes 'wrestles with the meaning of life in world that seems to be falling apart, much like the world in which we live.'

What these books have in common is that they point us 'backwards to the fundamental principles of how to live life in a fallen world and forward to the need for Christ and the gospel of good news.'

Belcher's study of these three books is in three parts.

In the first part (chapter 1) he explores how Old Testament scholars have sought to understand how the wisdom literature fits into the overall theology of the Old Testament. In the second part (chapters 2–10) he looks in turn at Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes, explaining what kind of literature they are, how they should be interpreted, their message, and the contribution each of them makes to Old Testament theology. In the third part (chapter 11) he considers how Jesus is the fulfilment of the teaching of these books about wisdom, looking at 'Wisdom in the teaching of Jesus,' 'Wisdom and the person of Christ' and 'Wisdom and the Work of Christ.'

**Commendations:**

Don Carson comments:

'Richard Belcher carefully sifts recent approaches to Old Testament Wisdom, and learns much from all of them, but comes away insisting that, while Wisdom is richly human, it is not humanistic: it is deeply God-centred, and properly grounded in creation... This thoughtful book, like the Wisdom it seeks to explore, will open up fresh horizons of reflection, and ... make its readers wiser than they were before.'

**Rosaria Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World*, Crossway, ISBN 978-1-43355-786-6, £15.99 (e and audible editions also available).**

### **Martin's opinion:**

*The Gospel Comes with a House Key* consists of ten chapters which look in turn at the merit, vitality, kindness, providence, seal, borderland, lamentation, basics, hope, and future of hospitality. A concluding chapter looks at 'Feeding the five thousand, nuts and bolts and beans and rice.' The book is a mixture of autobiography, theological reflection, and practical advice and puts forward a passionate plea for Christians to open their homes, their lives and their hearts to their believing and unbelieving neighbours alike. Not everyone will feel called, or feel able, to go as far as the Butterfields is opening their homes to those around them, but no one can properly evade her challenge to consider how much we are willing to share our lives, our homes and our possessions so that lost men and women may know God and grow into his likeness. An uncomfortable book, but one that everyone should read and ponder.

### **Overview:**

Rosaria Butterfield is best known for her book *The secret thoughts of an unlikely convert* which tells the story of how she moved from being a lesbian university professor and political activist to a pastor's wife and home schooling stay at home mother of a multi-racial family of adopted children. One of the features of the story she tells in that book is how she came to faith as a result of the hospitality offered to her by the pastor of her local Reformed Presbyterian Church and his wife and how she and her husband Kent subsequently came to practice similar hospitality as a key part of their own ministry.

In *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*, Butterfield explains how she understands the nature of hospitality and its importance as a key tool for sharing the gospel in the twenty-first century.

According to Butterfield, what she calls 'radical ordinary hospitality' is practised by those who with open doors and open hearts:

... see strangers as neighbors and neighbors as family of God. They recoil at reducing a person to a category or a label. They see God's image reflected in the eyes of every human being on earth. They know they are like meth addicts and sex-trade workers. They take their own sin seriously—including the sin of selfishness and pride. They take God's holiness and goodness seriously. They use the Bible as a lifeline, with no exceptions.

Those who live out radically ordinary hospitality see their homes not as theirs at all but as God's gift to use for the furtherance of his kingdom. They open doors; they seek out the underprivileged. They know that the gospel comes with a house key. They take biblical theology seriously, as well as Christian creeds and confessions and traditions.

In her view:

Engaging in radically ordinary hospitality means we provide the time necessary to build strong relationships with people who think differently than we do as well as build strong relationships from within the family of God. It means we know that only hypocrites and cowards let their words be stronger than their relationships, making sneaky raids into culture on social media or behaving like moralizing social prigs in the neighborhood. Radically ordinary hospitality shows this skeptical, post-Christian world what authentic Christianity looks like.

In households which practice radical hospitality:

... host and guest are interchangeable. If you come to my house for dinner and notice that I am still teaching a math lesson to a child, and my laundry remains on the dining room table unfolded, you roll up your sleeves and fold my laundry. Or set the table. Or load the dishwasher. Or feed the dogs. Radically ordinary hospitality means that hosts are not embarrassed to receive help, and guests know that their help is needed. A family of God gathering daily together needs each and every person. Host and guest are permeable roles.

Radically ordinary hospitality lived out in the family of God gathers daily, prays constantly, and needs no invitation to do so. And those who don't yet know the Lord are summoned for food and fellowship. Earthly good is shown as good, and the solitary may choose to be alone but need not be chronically lonely.

In the pages of her book, she says:

... you are invited into my home, into my childhood, into my Bible reading, into my repentance, and into my home school schedules, shopping lists, simple meals, and daily, messy table fellowship. You will meet my family, my parents, my children, my neighbors, my enemies, and my friends.

Her prayer is that:

...this book will help you let God use your home, apartment, dorm room, front yard, community gymnasium, or garden for the purpose of making strangers into neighbors and neighbors into family. Because that is the point—building the church and living like a family, the family of God. My prayer is that you will stop being afraid of strangers, even when some strangers are dangerous. My prayer is that you will grow to be more like Christ in practicing daily, ordinary, radical hospitality, and that the Lord would bless you richly for it, adding to his kingdom, creating a new culture and a new reputation for what it means to be a Christian to the watching world. My hope is that daily fellowship would grow your union with Christ and that you would no longer be that Christian with a pit of empty dreams competing madly with other reigning idols, wondering if this is all there is to the Christian life. My prayer is that you would see that practicing daily, ordinary, radical hospitality toward the end of rendering strangers neighbors and neighbors family of God is the missing link.

'If this happens,' she writes 'then my prayer will be answered.'

### **Commendations:**

Carl Trueman comments:

'One of the hallmarks of the people of God is supposed to be hospitality. But in an age of commuter churches, towns disemboweled by shopping malls, and lives that are overscheduled and full of ceaseless activity, hospitality is something which, like true friendship, is at a premium. In this book, Rosaria Butterfield makes a bold case for putting hospitality back into the essential rhythm of the church's daily life. She sets the bar very high—and there is plenty of room here for disagreement on some of the proposals and details—but the basic case, that church is to be a community marked by hospitality, is powerfully presented and persuasively argued.'

**Richard Coekin, *The Reluctant Evangelist*, The Good Book Company, ISBN 978-1-78498-341-3, £7.99 (e edition also available).**

### **Martin's opinion:**

This book is a helpful resource for encouraging people to engage in evangelism. It forms a good basis for a sermon series or for study in a home group setting. It would also be a useful book to lend or give away to people who know that they should evangelise, but for the reasons identified by Coekin are reluctant to do so. As Coekin notes, all Christians are called to bear witness to their faith and this book will help motivate them to fulfil more faithfully this calling.

### **Overview:**

Richard Coekin is a well-known preacher, evangelist and church planter. He is currently the Director of Co-Mission, a Church Planting Movement in London, and the Senior Pastor of Dundonald Church in South West London.

His new book starts with the observation that like the prophet Jonah in the Old Testament many of us today are reluctant evangelists. As he notes:

For some of us, our reluctance is temperamental—perhaps we're a little shy, reserved or introverted in character, and evangelism feels frightening.

For others of us, our reluctance is cultural—we've been raised to keep to ourselves, and evangelism seems rude.

For many of us, our reluctance is theological—we're just not sure if God wants all Christians to engage in mission, especially if we lack the gifts or calling in evangelism that others seem to have.

For most of us, our reluctance is motivational—we have so many responsibilities and problems to face that we're not persuaded that evangelism should really be an urgent priority for us right now.

Nevertheless, he says, for Christians evangelism is not something that is optional:

When our Lord Jesus first called his disciples he said, 'Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people'; later he warned them, 'If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory'; and when he left them he commanded, 'Go and make disciples of all nations' (Matthew 4 v 19, ESV; Mark 8 v 38; Matthew 28 v 19). So his apostle Peter insists, 'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have' (1 Peter 3 v 15).

In the face of this dual reality of our reluctance to evangelise and our obligation to do so the purpose of *The Reluctant Evangelist* is 'to help you conquer your reluctance—to follow Jesus unashamedly in making disciples for him, ready to explain your hope in language your family, friends and colleagues can understand.' It seeks to do this by exploring 'God's basic mission principles as they are beautifully clarified in the gripping memoirs of the prophet Jonah, read in the light of Christ and the rest of the Bible.'

As Coekin sees it:

.... effective evangelism begins with understanding the character and purposes of the living and loving God revealed in Jonah and fulfilled in Christ. It's only when we learn to trust his awesome power (chapter 1), experience his sovereign grace (chapter 2), fear his coming judgment (chapter 3) and share his gut-wrenching compassion (chapter 4)—as this is perfectly revealed in Jesus, the divine Evangelist—that our hearts will sing with the melodic line of Jonah, 'Salvation comes from the Lord' (Jonah 2 v 9). And when his Holy Spirit fills our hearts with his love, our lives will start to bubble up with the evangelistic enterprise that our friends, colleagues, communities and cities so desperately need.

His book expounds Jonah in the light of this conviction.

**Commendations:**

Vaughan Roberts declares:

'I love this book! It's full of biblical insight and practical wisdom on evangelism but, far from just filling the head with instruction, it warms the heart with passion. Richard not only reminds us of why and how we should share our faith but also inspires us to get on with it.'

**Benjamin Conner, *Disabling Mission, Enabling Witness*, Inter-Varsity Press, ISBN 978-0-8308-5102-7, £18.87.**

### **Martin's opinion:**

This is an important contribution to the growing field of disability theology. It should be of interest not just to those working in this field, or to those engaged in intentional ministry to disabled people, but to all those with responsibility for shaping the Church's teaching and practice. All churches have a responsibility for giving a central place in their life and mission to people with disability and this book introduces the intellectual tools for engaging in this task and shows how they should be deployed in practice. Those studying for the ministry and those engaged in ministry should both read this book.

### **Overview:**

Benjamin T. Conner is the Professor of practical theology at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, in the United States, where he is director of the Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry.

He begins the introduction to his new book on the relationship between disability and mission by telling us about Megan:

Megan is a thirty-four-year-old woman with cerebral palsy and a significant cognitive impairment who lives in a group home. She is barely verbal, difficult to understand, and, oddly, when she does speak, says everything at least twice in direct succession. She works a few hours a day at McDonalds during the week cleaning up the dining area. On weekends, she goes to church with us. She can't read, so she makes unusual noises during the songs and the recitation of the Apostles' Creed. Her friend, Seth, who has Down syndrome, now comes with her, and they always sit near each other. Once when we were out of town, Megan went to church by herself. Her phone made noise during the service, and she was unable to turn it off. She left.

Do you think you know Megan?

Let me try again.

Megan is a resident at Friendship House, a residence on the campus of Western Theological Seminary where seminary students share housing with young adults with intellectual disabilities. She delights in her housemates, and they are her best friends. She sometimes exercises, prepares meals, or creates artwork with the seminary students. On World Down Syndrome Day this past year (always March 21 to symbolize the value of the extra, or third copy of, the twenty-first chromosome in people with Down syndrome), four of the Friendship House Friend residents were looking forward to being acknowledged and celebrated. Megan does not have Downs, but her friends wanted to make sure she was included. When my wife pointed out that Megan didn't have Down syndrome, they insisted, "Megan has Downs." Megan nodded her head vigorously and repeated in affirmation, "Yes, I do . . . yes, I do." Why should she be excluded yet again, this time because she has the "wrong" disability?

She has difficulty communicating verbally and knows it, so in an effort to make sure you can understand what she is saying, she tends to say things at least twice. Every day during the work week, Megan takes public transportation to her job. Once a week she rides horses at a therapeutic riding center. On her way to work, she often texts her friends the emoji of a hamburger, and when it is time to ride, she texts an emoji of a horse. On the weekends, she joins my family at church (and texts us an emoji of a church to let us know she is there and waiting for us), and she is an important part of our community of witness. Though she can't read, she participates in all aspects of the worship service and offers habituated responses to the music and the recitation of the Apostles' Creed. Megan has a contagious enthusiasm about church and emits a profoundly joyful and largely nonverbal witness to being included in the body of Christ.

In his book Conner draws together the twin disciplines of disability studies and mission studies to explore how the Church can give a central place in its life and witness to people like Megan through a process of '[dis]abling' in which the Church's thinking and practice is reconfigured in order to give proper place to the experiences and gifts of those who are disabled. As Conner puts it:

The twin purposes of this book are to stimulate a conversation between disability studies and theology (particularly mission studies) around a vision of the entire body of Christ sharing in the witness of the church, and to imagine how we might [dis] able Christian theology, discipleship and theological education for the sake of enabling congregational witness. In the chapters that follow I prepare the way for dialogue between mission studies and disability studies by introducing theoretical tools and conceptual categories for

[dis]abling from both fields, provide concrete examples of the process of [dis]abling, and propose some ways that our congregational witness is enabled when people with disabilities are introduced.

The book is in two parts.

Part I, 'Setting the stage,' starts the conversation with two chapters that provide 'An Introduction to Disability Studies for Mission Studies,' and 'An Introduction to Mission Studies for Disability Studies.'

Part II, 'Towards enabling witness' consists of three chapters, 'Deaf to the Ways of God,' 'Intellectual Disabilities and Our Iconic Witness' and '[Dis]abling Theological Education.' These chapters look at specific examples of enabling witness by looking at how the Church should relate to those who are deaf or intellectually disabled and how it can give a central place to the experiences and concerns of disabled people in theological education.

### **Commendations:**

Benjamin Davis comments:

'Benjamin Conner has written a groundbreaking book that seeks to install a disability perspective to mission studies. The book also suggests that missiology might bring some insights to disability studies. Using examples from the world of the Deaf and the cognitively disabled, as well as other disabilities, Conner has written an enlightening but also soul-searching work of importance.'

**Paul Hinlicky, *Luther for Evangelicals: A Re-introduction*, Baker Academic, ISBN 978-0-80109-888-8, £13.99 (e edition also available).**

### **Martin's opinion:**

This book will be of interest to Evangelicals who want to know more about what Luther taught and what his teaching can contribute to a renewal of Evangelicalism in our day. Luther scholarship has done important work in separating Luther's own teaching from subsequent Lutheran teaching and Hinlicky's work does an important service in introducing Evangelicals to the fruit of this work and thereby re-introducing them to the original Luther. Evangelicals, particularly Anglican Evangelicals, have tended to look to Calvin and the Reformed tradition for inspiration rather than to Luther, but Hinlicky shows that Luther has in fact much to teach Evangelicals today. Students and ministers alike will benefit from reading this book.

### **Overview:**

Paul Hinlicky is Professor of Lutheran Studies at Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia in the United States. In his new book *Luther for Evangelicals* he argues that Luther needs to be re-introduced to the Evangelical theological world for two reasons.

First, Evangelicals need to be re-introduced to the original Luther because he has been concealed from them by the way he has been portrayed in the Lutheran tradition stemming from Philipp Melancthon:

Luther is not the possession of the denominations named after him. Historically speaking, Lutheranism is Luther as mediated by his younger colleague, Philipp Melancthon, who survived him and put a decisive but ultimately misleading cast on his legacy. The resulting Lutheranism from the beginning dove into 'identity politics,' accentuating certain kinds of differences from other Christians while ignoring certain kinds of affinities. Luther, to be sure, battled as much with would-be allies as with declared enemies. This embattled Luther, certain of the impending end of days, was henceforth pressed into service, made over into the prophetic founder of Lutheranism, which thought of itself as the true, visible church of God on earth. Other Christians ever since have taken Luther as filtered by the various Lutheran representations of him (as prophet, as hero of individual conscience, as national liberator, and always as enemy of all things Roman)—even as these others were also caught up in identity politics of their own. In recent times, however, a new Luther picture is emerging that conscientiously seeks to identify and avoid such fallacies.

Secondly, Evangelicals need to be re-introduced to Luther because he is a significant but neglected source for their own theological tradition:

If, historically, we see the sources of evangelicalism in the Puritan doctrine of the new birth descending from Calvinist Anglicanism, the Wesleyan doctrine of the new birth descending from Arminianism, and the Anabaptist doctrine of the new birth as conformation to the cross and resurrection of Christ, we can in different ways trace these genealogies back to Luther's doctrine of justification by faith. By the same token, these various sources of evangelicalism are not entirely compatible with each other; indeed, in some ways they militate against each other and can coexist only to the extent that an inarticulate experience of the new birth is elevated over the understanding of it. But that elevation of experience over understanding has had its day. Evangelical theology today is in a state of internal crisis precisely across this axis.

As Hinlicky sees it, an encounter with the teaching of the original Luther will assist Evangelicals to overcome their internal crisis by giving them a stronger theological basis rooted in Luther's teaching about the 'joyful exchange' between our sins and Christ's righteousness.

Hinlicky's book is in two main parts.

Part 1, 'Luther in Evangelical perspective' takes as its starting point the four characteristic emphases of the Evangelical tradition identified by the historian David Bebbington—conversion, Scripture, mission and the centrality of the cross. The four chapters in this part of the book ('The New Birth,' 'The Bible,' 'Evangelization' and 'The Atonement') look at what Luther taught about each of these four emphases and how what he says provides important theological resources for Evangelical thinking about them.

Part 2, 'Luther's Evangelical theology,' takes as its starting point the teaching of Luther's *Large Catechism*. The four chapters in this part look at the teaching of this document under the headings 'Catechesis as Christian Torah,' 'The Decalogue,' 'The Creed' and 'The Christian life' and as before considers how what Luther has to say can contribute to a renewal of Evangelical thinking and practice.

**Commendations:**

Tom Greggs writes:

'The need for contemporary evangelicals to rediscover their magisterial Protestant heritage is pressing: there are depths for us to plumb which will only enhance our sense of the urgency of the gospel and the unique significance of Christ. Hinlicky has done the church and the academy a great service with this book and its reengagement with Luther. A masterful contribution.'

**Christopher Holmes, *The Lord Is Good: Seeking The God Of The Psalter, Apollos*, ISBN 978-1-78359-656-0, £16.99 (e edition also available).**

**Martin's opinion:**

As the quotations I have given below indicate, Holmes' book is not an easy read. Like his mentor, the late Professor John Webster, he writes in a very dense style. His book also presupposes a good working knowledge of historical and systematic theology. However, those who are prepared to persevere at unpacking his meaning and who have the requisite theological knowledge to follow his argument will be richly rewarded by being challenged to think hard about what God is like and how what God is like shapes his actions and our existence as his creatures. This is a book that will greatly benefit students in their later years of theological study who want to deepen their thinking about God and also clergy and lay ministers who want to be stimulated to think afresh about the God whom they are called to proclaim.

**Overview:**

Christopher Holmes is an Anglican priest who is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Otago in New Zealand. His new book in the Apollos 'Studies in Christian Doctrine and Scripture' series addresses the question of what we can say about the God who is described in the Psalms.

As Holmes sees it, the pre-eminent thing that the Psalms teach us to say about God is that he is good. Accordingly, his book is a study of the goodness of God as this is revealed to us in the Psalms and in Scripture as a whole.

In Holmes' own words:

'This is a book about God, indeed God's goodness. In the pages to come, I unfold something of how God is goodness itself. Goodness is worth contemplating because it is the preeminent claim the Psalms make with respect to God. Of course, Scripture as a whole makes many assertions about God's nature: for example, God is almighty, faithful, holy, and merciful. But I want to think through why goodness among the attributes has pre-eminence in the Psalter: 'You are good' (Ps 119:68). Indeed, I argue that goodness's priority in the Psalter extends to all of Scripture. Goodness has a scriptural density and range that even the other great attribute—love—does not quite have.'

For Holmes, the reason for focussing on goodness rather than love as the pre-eminent attribute of God is because:

'There are compelling reasons to consider God's goodness as the source and basis of God's love, just as there are for God's great works of mercy and grace that his goodness as communicated accomplishes. Mercy, grace, faithfulness—these are forms of his goodness. Goodness has the character of a cause and end; goodness is causal and teleological in nature. Accordingly, I show how God's goodness is the ground of creation because it is by its very nature communicative. God loves his own goodness and therefore creates things to share in it. I also unfold how goodness is the end of creation. God wills that all things share in the goodness he is. Goodness is creation's principle and telos. God loves us by willing good to us, so much so that he conserves and perfects us in the good he is. The end of all creatures is goodness, and it is from love of that same goodness that God wills to communicate it to created things. It is not insignificant, then, that God's effects of nature are declared in the opening chapters of Genesis to be good. They are good because, as we shall see, all of God's works, whether they are of nature, grace, or glory, participate in their cause.'

Holmes explores God's the biblical witness to God's goodness with three main conversation partners, St Augustine, Karl Barth and (most importantly) St. Thomas Aquinas. His exploration begins by looking at what it means to speak rightly about God and then goes on to look at what it means to say that God is good, the Trinitarian nature of God's goodness, how God does good in creation and providence, how God's goodness relates to the existence of evil, the goodness of God's law, Jesus Christ as God's goodness made flesh and perfection as participation in God's goodness.

**Commendations:**

Derek Tidball writes

'Many have sought to identify the essential message of the Psalms. Christopher Holmes ably defends his contention that it's the deceptively simple claim that 'the Lord is good.' It's deceptively simple because once he begins to expound its meaning, he leads us to a deep understanding of the nature of God in his being, actions, character, commands, and as Trinity. Furthermore, it leads to a profound consideration of God's relation to his creation and to us as fallen human creatures. Like an intrepid explorer, Holmes probes the terrain in conversation with the theological greats, from Augustine to Barth and beyond, but especially in conversation with Thomas Aquinas.

Intellectually robust and theologically astute, this is a book that is also spiritually enriching and devotionally stimulating. Careful study of it will lead its readers to see hidden depths in the book of Psalms and, even more significantly, to encounter the God who is good.'

**Scott McKnight, *The Hum of Angels*, Monarch, ISBN 978-0857218599, £9.99 (also available in hardback, e book and audio formats).**

### **Martin's opinion:**

McKnight writes as a committed Roman Catholic, but this is a book which Evangelicals can use with confidence. He heeds Barth's warning about sticking to what the Bible teaches and provides a reliable and readable overview of what it tells us about whom angels are and the part that they play in God's loving purposes. It can be recommended to anyone, whether clergy or laity, who want to discover more about angels for themselves or want guidance in teaching others about them.

### **Overview:**

Scott McKnight is a biblical scholar who is Professor of the New Testament at Northern Theological Seminary in Lombard, Illinois in the United States. McKnight has written more than fifty books and his latest book is on the subject of angels.

He begins his book by noting that it is common for people to encounter angels

The hum of angels has been heard by theologians and pastors and priests, to be sure, but far more often by ordinary lay folks. Angels have been spotted by men and women and old folks and young adults. Doctors and lawyers and scientists and mechanics and landscapers and truck drivers all have seen them. Angels are no respecter of persons in their disclosures. Some people experience angels at a birth, others around the time of a loved one's death. Sometimes angels are seen by a dying person and other times by loved ones who attend to the dying. Sometimes people experience an angel at the moment their loved one dies a great distance away. Bible readers know that some angels appear during a person's sleep – and this, too, is common today.

However, he says, 'Most people who experience angels don't tell anyone, or if they do, they tell only a person or two.' The reason this is the case is because we live in a sceptical world where it is embarrassing to claim to have encountered an angel.

As McKnight sees it, this embarrassment, and the scepticism that lies behind it, is misplaced:

If God, who cannot be seen, exists, why would anyone refuse to believe in lesser-but-just-as-invisible angels and spirits? If we grant the reality of an invisible world, the supernatural, a reality just beyond ours, why would we put limits on what's out there?'

However, if we accept that it is rational to believe that angels exist this leaves open the question of what angels are and what their role is in God's economy. It is this question that McKnight explores in his book.

McKnight quotes with approval the words of Karl Barth

The teacher and the master to which we must keep in this matter [about angels] can only be the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, that we must not accept any other authority, that we must listen exhaustively to what this guide has to tell us, and that we must respect what it says and what it does not say.

On the basis of this starting point he surveys what the Bible has to say about angels from Genesis to Revelation and argues that what it teaches is that angels are created spiritual beings who are vehicles of 'God's loving presence,' agents of 'God's loving advocacy' on our behalf and instruments of 'God's loving transformation' of our lives.

The fundamental teaching of the Bible, he argues, is that:

'God is Love.

All that God does is loving.

God sends angels to us because God loves us.

Love is a rugged commitment to be *With*,

to be *For* us so that we can

progress *Unto* Christlikeness.

Angels are sent to express God's love  
by being God's presence with us,  
*by being God's presence for us*, and  
to lead us into the redemption of Christlikeness.

**Commendations:**

Jonathan Macy has written:

'Books on the angelic in the Bible are usually of varying quality--so fluffy and story filled they lack a coherent basis in Scripture, or so impenetrably philosophical one can't apply them to the normal Christian life. Scot McKnight's *The Hum of Angels* carefully avoids all these pitfalls and presents a sound and balanced biblical vision of God's angelic realm and its work. He helpfully reimagines the ministry of angels, while keeping his work rooted in and framed by Scripture. *The Hum of Angels* is a worthy addition to the library of anyone wanting a solid, insightful, and scriptural view of God's angelic ministers.'

**Olli-Pekka Vainio, *Cosmology in Theological Perspective*, Baker Academic, ISBN 978-0-80109-943-4, £15.99 (e edition also available).**

### **Martin's opinion:**

Although this is a relatively short book (224 pages), it is comprehensive in its scope. It covers both the history of Christian thinking about cosmology and how Christians should respond to the big cosmological questions being asked by believers and unbelievers in our day. The issues that Vainio discusses in this book are important ones for anyone who wants to think about cosmology from a Christian perspective and he gives a clear and balanced introduction to them with helpful footnotes pointing further reading. Those who are unfamiliar with philosophical theology may struggle with parts of his discussion, but for the most part this is an accessible read that theological students, ministers and ordinary lay people will all find useful.

### **Overview:**

The Finnish theologian Olli-Pekka Vainio lectures in Systematic Theology at the University of Helsinki. His new book published by Baker Academic, which forms part of a NASA funded project on astrobiology, is concerned with the relationship between Christian theology and cosmology, the study of the nature of the universe and the place of humanity within it.

The book, which takes its inspiration from the work done in this area by C S Lewis, is divided into ten chapters.

Chapter 1 explores at how the ancient world constructed its cosmologies and how the cosmologies contained in the Old Testament and in the writing of Plato and Aristotle have shaped subsequent Christian thinking about cosmology.

Chapter 2 looks at how the early Christian, and particularly St. Augustine and St. Basil, interpreted what the Bible has to say about cosmology.

Chapter 3 considers how the debates about cosmology sparked off by the work of Copernicus, Galileo and Darwin, 'can teach us many things about how to think – and not to think – about the relation between theological convictions and theological facts.

Chapter 4 discusses how the theory that there are multitude of different universes (the 'multiverse' idea) relates to Christian theism.

Chapter 5 investigates 'how the possibility of alien life might fit together with Christian theism, or if Christianity implies that we are alone in the universe.'

Chapter 6 explores the questions about 'human value and significance' raised by our contemporary knowledge of the vast size of the universe.

Chapter 7 looks at how we can speak meaningfully about God if he 'is not a part of creation and transcends every name and concept' and how the concept of divine hiddenness' can 'help us understand something about the nature of revelation.'

Chapter 8 discusses what is meant by the idea of the 'image of God' and what this idea might mean for our understanding of the nature of angels, animals, aliens and artificial intelligences.

Chapter 9 considers whether there might have been 'multiple incarnations' in different worlds across the universe in order to achieve God's benevolent purposes in creation (think of C S Lewis' idea of the incarnation of Christ as Aslan for example) or whether the single incarnation of Christ in our world sufficed to fulfil these purposes.

Chapter 10 uses the distinction made by C S Lewis between 'reason' and imagination' 'to offer a framework for how to continue thinking about cosmology from a theological perspective. Given everything we know at this point in history, how should we pursue our quest for a greater understanding of God and the universe?'

### **Commendations:**

Deborah Haarsma comments :

'This book is a serious theological treatment of questions that astronomers and laypeople often ask about the cosmos. If scientists were to discover intelligent aliens, or that our universe is part of a vast multiverse, what would that mean for human identity, uniqueness, and significance? These critical questions are too often overlooked in modern discussions of science and faith, so this book is a timely and welcome addition. Vainio offers a knowledgeable and balanced guide through strands of ancient thought, medieval Christian views, atheist claims, philosophical frameworks, and modern christological approaches.'

**Peter Walker, *The Story of the Holy Land: A visual history*, Lion, ISBN 978-0-74598-053-9, £12.99.**

**Martin's opinion:**

As one online reviewer puts it, the book is 'written in an accessible form for someone who wants the key information quickly, without too much detail.' It would be ideal as an introduction to the history of the Holy Land for older children or for adults who know nothing about the subject. It would also provide a useful orientation for those visiting the Holy land for the first time and a great souvenir for those who have been and want a reminder of their visit. Highly recommended.

**Overview:**

Peter Walker is a biblical scholar and historian who has written extensively about the history of the Holy Land and led many tours there. In this book from Lion, newly re-issued in a paperback edition, he draws on this experience to provide an accessible account of the history of the Holy Land from the time of the Patriarchs to the present day. This history is told in 'seven key chapters focussed around seven key centuries.' Chapter 1, 'Canaanites and Israelites' (1950–1050 BC) focusses on 'The conquering century (1260–1180 BC).' Chapter 2, 'Tribes and Kings' (1050–587), focuses on 'The crowning century (1020–930 BC).' Chapter 3, 'Refugees and Greeks (587–40 BC),' focuses on 'The returning century (530-430 BC).' Chapter 4, 'The Crucial Century (40 BC– AD 70),' focuses on the life of Jesus on Nazareth. Chapter 5, 'Romans and Byzantines (AD 70–630),' focuses on 'The Constantinian century (AD 310–410).' Chapter 6, 'Muslims and Crusaders (AD 630–1291),' focuses on 'The crusading century (AD 1090–1184).' Chapter 7, 'Ottomans and Westerners (AD 1291–1948),' focuses on 'The returning century' (AD 1820–1917).' A final short chapter, 'Since then...' brings the story up to date.

What the book provides is a concise, but scholarly, account of the main events of the periods each chapter describes with text illustrated throughout with stunning full page photographs, most in colour and including original nineteenth and twentieth century shots taken from the archives of the *Ecole Biblique* in Jerusalem.

**Commendations:**

Jerome Murphy O-Connor declares:

'Stunning large-scale photographs, linked and illuminated by an insightful text, encapsulate the 4000-year sweep of the history of the Holy Land in a way that will refresh the expert and instruct the beginner.'