

Latimer Trust

Monthly Reading List – February 2020

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
Sam Allberry	<i>Why Does God Care Who I Sleep With?</i>	An excellent resource for ordinary Christians who know what the Christian faith teaches, but who are not sure of the reasons for this teaching, or how to communicate it to their non-Christian families and friends.
Julia Cameron (ed)	<i>Michael Green - By His Friends: An Authorized Biography</i>	This book is a fitting tribute to a great man of God and the starting point for anyone who wants to know his story, what he was like and what he stood for.
David Hutchings and David Wilkinson	<i>God, Stephen Hawking and the Multiverse – What Hawking Said and Why It Matters</i>	Readers who put in the necessary effort will be rewarded by a very much better understanding of the big questions in physics addressed by Hawking and how he answered.
Kevin Kinghorn	<i>But What About God's Wrath?: The Compelling Love Story of Divine Anger</i>	For anyone who does want to understand this way of viewing the relationship between God's love and God's wrath, this book is now the place to start.
Peter Walker	<i>The Jesus Way: Learning to Live the Christian Life</i>	This book would make an excellent resource for people who have been on courses such as <i>Alpha</i> and <i>Christianity Explored</i> and who now want to understand more about the nature of Christian discipleship as well as for those preparing for baptism or confirmation.

Sam Allberry, *Why Does God Care Who I Sleep With?*, The Good Book Company, ISBN 978-178498-277-5, £10.05 (e edition also available).

Overview:

Sam Allberry is a pastor who is a global speaker for Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, an editor for The Gospel Coalition, and the author of a number of best-selling books on Christian apologetics and human sexuality including *Is God Anti-Gay?* and *Why Bother with Church?*

His new book, *Why Does God Care Who I Sleep With?*, is the fourth book in the Oxford Apologetics series published by the Good Book Company in partnership with the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics and the Zacharias Institute. The aim of the series is to provide concise introductions to current issues in Christian apologetics, and, as Allberry explains, the issue of sexual ethics addressed by his book is one of the most challenging of these issues.

He writes:

There are significant challenges for Christians in discussions about sex. More and more, sexual freedom is regarded as one of the greatest goods in western society. A huge amount has changed over the past decade or so. Just fifteen years ago Christians like me, who follow the teaching of the Bible, would have been thought of as old-fashioned for holding to the traditional Christian understanding of sex being exclusively for marriage.

But now, increasingly, we are thought of as being dangerous to society. Our views on sex have become *that* significant. Who we sleep with is seen as a supreme human right. Anything that seems to constrain our choice in this area is somehow viewed as an existential threat.

The result of this change of public attitude is that:

...the Christian claim that sex is for a very particular context is far more of an offense than it is a curiosity. *Why should God care who I sleep with?* is perhaps less a question and more just a free standing objection that doesn't really require an answer.

'And yet', argues Allberry:

...an answer exists. Christians continue to believe what we believe about sex, it is a belief that isn't going away, however much it might be derided today. And it is a belief for which there are compelling reasons. I would love you to understand these reasons and weigh them properly before you decide what to do with them.

God cares who we sleep with because he cares deeply about the people who are doing the sleeping. He cares because sex was his idea, not ours. He cares because misusing sex can cause profound hurt and damage. He cares because he regards us as worthy of his care and, in fact, that care is not only seen in telling us how we should use sex, but also in how he makes forgiveness and healing available to us when we mess this up .

In the book as a whole, Allberry develops the argument sketched out in these last two paragraphs in eleven short chapters which look in turn at:

- Why do we care who we sleep with?
- What is a little girl worth?
- What is sex for?
- Is sex really just for marriage?
- Why was this so controversial back then?
- Why is this so controversial today?
- What if I've really messed up?
- Don't we need to be sexually fulfilled to be who we are?
- Isn't love enough?

- Why does this really matter to God? – the bigger story
- Why does this really matter to God? – the better story

In these chapters Allberry sets out the case for the traditional orthodox Christian view of sexual ethics in way that is readable, up-to date, and rooted in the bigger and better story of the creative and redemptive activity of God. He explains why God expects his human creatures to live in a particular way, but also explains how he offers forgiveness and a new start to those who failed to live in this way.

Martin's opinion:

Like the late Michael Green, Allberry has the knack of showing how Christian truth speaks to the issues and concerns of people today. His new book is an excellent resource for ordinary Christians who know what the Christian faith teaches, but who are not sure of the reasons for this teaching, or how to communicate it to their non-Christian families and friends. Christians should buy it for themselves, but also buy spare copies to give away to those they know who are asking the question 'Why does God care who I sleep with?'

Commendations:

Amy Orr-Ewing comments.

Sam Allberry writes with clarity and empathy about one of the biggest questions of our day. His honesty and sense of humour cut through the stereotypes and platitudes we might be used to hearing about sexual relationships. Here is a counter cultural voice challenging us to consider afresh the Christian faith and ultimately a relationship with God amidst the changing landscape of culture we find ourselves in.

Julia Cameron (ed), *Michael Green - By His Friends: An Authorized Biography*, Inter-Varsity Press, ISBN 978-1789741148, £16.99 (e edition also available).

Overview:

Michael Green, who died last year, was a New Testament scholar, theologian, church leader and evangelist who was one of the key leaders of the Evangelical movement, both in the Church of England and the Church worldwide, in the second half of the twentieth century and the opening decades of the twenty-first. There are literally millions of people whose lives have been profoundly changed for the better because of his speaking and his writing.

In spite of the sub-title 'an authorized biography' this new book about Michael that has been edited by Julia Cameron, the Director of Publishing for the Evangelical Fellowship of the Anglican Communion, is not a detailed biography of Green like the biographies of J I Packer and C S Lewis written by Alister McGrath or Owen Chadwick's life of Michael Ramsey. It is certainly 'authorized' in the sense that it has been produced with the agreement of Green's family, but it is not a blow by blow account of his life and work.

As Cameron explains in her foreword, it is instead a collection of memories of Green by his family and friends. In Cameron's words 'the focus has been on gathering memories, perceptions and impressions, while maintaining a strong narrative line, so that later writing will have dependable sources from which to draw.'

The book contains twenty-one contributions and is divided into four parts.

Part 1, 'The formative years,' covers the period from his school days to his curacy at Holy Trinity, Eastbourne.

Part 2, 'A man of many talents,' covers his time at the London College of Divinity and St John's Nottingham, his ministry at St Aldate's Oxford, and his time at Regent College, Vancouver. It also covers the development of his world-wide ministry and his love of country sports.

Part 3, 'Return to Oxford and retirement,' covers his involvement with the Springboard initiative and his subsequent ministry as a senior fellow at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford and a leader of university missions across Europe.

Part 4, 'Last few weeks; and following Michael's death,' contains the last interview he gave, the last talk he wrote, the responses to the news of his death and a 'family perspective' from his son Tim.

The book also contains three appendixes: 'The anatomy of a town mission,' 'List of books with year of first publication,' and 'Staff appointed by Michael Green (St John's and St Aldate's).'

Martin's opinion:

Those like the present reviewer who had the privilege of knowing Michael, know how he illustrated Paul's words 'we have this treasure in earthen vessels' (2 Corinthians 4:7). As he himself would be the first to admit, he was a stubborn, driven, idiosyncratic and flawed individual who could be immensely difficult to work with and for. And yet, he was also a humble, dedicated, prayerful man, who was immensely generous with his time and the use of his talents, a man who loved God, his family, and other people, and who kept on witnessing faithfully to Jesus Christ even during his final stay in hospital.

This book is a fitting tribute to a great man of God and, together with his own memoir *Adventure of Faith*, it is now the starting point for anyone who wants to know his story, what he was like and what he stood for.

Commendations:

Andrew Symes has written:

This is no detached, merely factual biography, but a series of warm, affectionate reminiscences mixed with a clear overarching account of the life and various ministries in which Michael was involved and, in most cases, led. The reader learns about an amazing man, and also a snapshot of the history of English Anglican evangelicalism from around 1950 to the present – a history in which perhaps only John Stott played a more influential role than Michael Green.

David Hutchings and David Wilkinson, *God, Stephen Hawking and the Multiverse – What Hawking Said and Why It Matters*, SPCK, ISBN 978-0-28108-191-2, £9.99 (Kindle edition also available).

Overview:

The late Professor Stephen Hawking was one of the major public figures in this country at the end of the last century and the beginning of this. He was a world-renowned physicist, a best-selling author and a role model for those coping with disability. He appeared regularly on radio and television and even had a film made about his life.

For Christians (and indeed for everyone else) Hawking's work on cosmology and his theory of the 'multiverse' (the idea that there may be an infinite number of universes alongside the one we inhabit) raise the biggest of all big questions, namely, 'What is the nature of the cosmos in which we live and, in the light of what we now know, is it still rational to believe in God as the creator of all things?'

These questions are raised particularly in his 1988 book *A Brief History of Time* and his 2010 book *The Grand Design – New Answers to the Ultimate Questions in Life*, which he co-authored with Leonard Mlodinow.

In their new book, *God, Stephen Hawking and the Multiverse*, David Hutchings, who teaches physics at Pocklington School near York, and David Wilkinson, an astrophysicist and theologian who is the Principal of St John's College Durham, explore the big questions raised by Hawking's work from a Christian perspective.

As they explain in their introduction :

To do so, we will need to learn some physics, so the first few chapters will cover the key ideas needed to access Hawking's arguments.

Hawking, like all physicists, builds on the work of those who have gone before him – whether in gravity, quantum theory or cosmology. This means there are stories to be told about the foundations of physics and these are necessary in order to understand his work. Once these foundations are in place, we will carefully review the theories put forward in *Brief History* and *Grand Design*, analysing the universe that they claim exists.

As we do, it is important to understand that Hawking was a theoretician – much of his work was rather abstract and speculative, not confirmed yet in anyway by experiment. In some cases, it is quite possible that it will never be confirmed. Because of this, we will need to see what other physicists have said about the same topics and the same data – do they agree with Hawking or consider him off-piste? What is the current standing within the industry, off his ideas?

Having looked at physics:

...It will be time get into some philosophy for the two fields are far more intimately related than many realise. What does Hawking think of the consequences, on the ground, of his theories? Which of these matters to our previously mentioned average Joe? Which of them don't?

From there, we will climb to the pinnacle of question posing and address the greatest topic of all: God. Hawking and God are, put simply, inseparable. God is named on many of the pages of *Brief History* and *Grand Design*, and indirectly there on those with no mentions of him. Both books deal up-close-and-personal with the God question. It is to Hawking's great credit that he doesn't duck the issue – but does he do it justice? What do the theologians think?

The conclusions Hitchens and Wilkinson reach are that Hawking's theories about physics are a mixed bag with some of them probably true and some probably not. They also argue that his arguments against philosophical realism (the belief that we can know the universe as it really is) undercut themselves. Finally, following John Lennox, they argue that Hawking's rejection of arguments for the existence of God on the basis of the existence of multiple universes and the idea that the universe inhabited by humans will necessarily look as if it was the result of design regardless of whether it was or not (the so-called 'anthropic principle') is likewise philosophically unconvincing and, if taken

seriously, would destroy the very science on which it claims to depend. In their words: 'Anyone seeking to call on the multiverse and the anthropic principle to get rid of God, then, had better be careful – for they might end up throwing out the scientific baby with the (holy) bath water.'

At the end of their book they argue that for all his undoubted brilliance as a physicist Hawking did not go far enough in considering all the relevant evidence for the existence of God. This is because he ignored the data that tells us that God made himself known through his actions in the history of Israel and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When we consider this additional data, they say, we learn that we exist because Jesus made us and that we exist in order to 'glorify God and enjoy him for ever.' In the end Hawking failed to address the biggest question of them all, Jesus' question 'Who do you say I am?' (Matthew 16:15).

Martin's opinion:

This book is not an easy read, particularly for non-scientists. However, anyone with a reasonable level of education will be able to understand it if they put in the necessary effort. If they do, they will be rewarded by a very much better understanding of the big questions in physics addressed by Hawking and how he answered. They will also have a much better understanding of the limitations of Hawking's work and why his rejection of God (often cited by contemporary sceptics because of the prestige of Hawking's reputation) remains unpersuasive. Finally, they will see why it is Jesus Christ rather than Stephen Hawking to whom we have to look if we are to find the ultimate answers to the key questions about the nature and purpose of our existence.

Commendations:

Althea Wilkinson writes:

If you have ever wanted to understand what Stephen Hawking was talking about but couldn't face the maths, this is the book for you. If you have ever felt uncomfortable that such an eminent scientist should dismiss the need for God, this is also the book for you. In an entertaining yet searching way, the authors put Hawking's work in perspective, scientifically, philosophically and theologically.

Kevin Kinghorn, *But What About God's Wrath?: The Compelling Love Story of Divine Anger*, IVP Academic, ISBN 978-083085-229-1, £12.99 (Kindle edition also available).

Overview:

Kevin Kinghorn is a professor of philosophy and religion at Asbury Theological Seminary in the United States where he teaches graduate courses in philosophy of religion, moral philosophy, and theology.

His new book is an exploration of the relationship between God's love and wrath. As he notes: 'There's a lot in Scripture about God's love for us. But there's quite a lot about God's wrath as well.' This being the case, the question that arises is how God's love and God's wrath relate to one another. Are they two separate aspects of who God is, or are they two forms of one single way in which God exists?

Kinghorn is a Christian philosopher and so he approaches this question from the standpoint of philosophical theology, but in developing his argument he also drew on the expertise of the New Testament scholar Stephen Travis who 'provided 150 pages (single spaced!) of systematic notes on biblical passages having to do with God's wrath.' As a result: 'This book can be described as the outcome of a philosopher and biblical scholar putting their heads together.'

The book starts by noting that when the Bible talks about God's wrath it is talking about a 'pattern of action' by God. This being case, the question that then arises is 'What purposes or goals is God seeking to achieve when he commits to the pattern of action we associate with divine wrath?'

Kinghorn then goes on to argue that a 'key, essential divine attribute' is that 'God is love' (1 John 4:8). God is three interdependent divine persons, existing as one divine substance, who eternally relate to each other in self-giving love, and God seeks to share that relationship of love with his human creatures. God's other attributes such as justice, mercy, holiness and wrath are expressions of this basic divine reality.

This raises the further question of how God's wrath can be an expression of God's desire that his human creatures should share in his life of love. The answer that Kinghorn gives is that sinful human being deceive themselves in two ways. They deceive themselves by thinking that they do not need to depend on God and they deceive themselves by thinking that they can flourish if they live a life in which they fail to love God and their neighbours. Both these forms of self-deception prevent people being in a loving relationship with God either in this world, or in the world to come, and so are contrary to God's desire for human flourishing.

When God acts in wrath, God presses on people the truth of their condition in order to break through this self-deception. In Kinghorn's words 'he gives then a taste of the disastrous life that awaits any person who is truly separated from God's life-giving present and blessing.' To put it another way, when God inflicts wrath on people he gives them a foretaste of the alienation from God experienced by the lost in hell in order that they might recognise their need to turn back to God and accept his love while there is still time for them to do so.

Kinghorn's overall conclusion is that God is both a God of love and a God of wrath:

But not in the sense that God's wrath could ever compete with God's love. God's wrath and God's love are not twin equal pillars within the character of God. God's actions towards us are consistently and thoroughly loving. He invites all people into a loving relationship with him. Because this relationship must be built on truth, God will do all he can to help us acknowledge the truth. If this means he must press the truth on us in sometimes drastic ways, he will do that. He is that committed to our long-term good. God at times is a God of wrath precisely because he is a God of love.

Martin's opinion:

Kinghorn's argument is not a new one. It is, for instance, the argument put forward by Karl Barth in the *Church Dogmatics* and by C S Lewis in *The Problem of Pain*. What Kinghorn gives us, however, is a clear, concise, and extremely logical exposition of this argument. He spells out, step by step, the links between saying that God is a God of love and that he is *therefore* a God who acts in wrath in the sometimes fearfully severe ways depicted in Scripture.

Not everyone will agree with Kinghorn's argument. There are those in the Reformed tradition, for example, who would want to question whether God really does love all people in the way that Kinghorn describes. However, for anyone who does want to understand this way of viewing the relationship between God's love and God's wrath this book is now the place to start. Highly recommended.

Commendations:

Paul Copan declares:

In an era that diminishes or altogether dismisses divine wrath and judgment – a phenomenon found even within the church – Kinghorn and Travis have written a much-needed book on the subject. They point out that wrath is not a central attribute of God but is actually an expression of divine love, which is directed toward the well-being and flourishing of humans. The book is thoughtful, wise, and biblically informed. I enthusiastically recommend it!

Peter Walker, *The Jesus Way: Learning to Live the Christian Life*, Monarch, ISBN 978-0857219602, £15.99 (Kindle edition also available).

Overview:

Peter Walker is the Director of the Theological Resource Network for the Evangelical Fellowship of the Anglican Communion. A prolific author, he was formerly a professor at Trinity School for Ministry in the United States and lecturer in the New Testament at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford.

His new book is an updated version of a guide to Christian discipleship that was first published in 2009. As Walker explains in his introduction, the book 'was born in the villages of Uganda.' Leading a team of Oxford students in Uganda in 2004, Walker became acutely aware of the lack of resources available to the churches there to help new believers grow as Christian disciples.

Seeing the joy with which Christians received their own copy of the Bible for the first time, he writes:

I saw in a new way the great treasure on which I had been sitting. The New Testament – like Jesus himself (naturally!) – is a 'fine Pearl of great value.' It comes from him and reflects his brilliance. It's a book therefore, that cannot be left in academic libraries, but must be enjoyed and then shared. It's a life changing book. Indeed, it's a living book, focused on Jesus who himself is a living person and so it must be lived out in real lives.

So looking out on the mud huts from our Jeep window as we said our farewells, I resolved to try and write a book that might introduce people to the truths of the New Testament – even if they never had a copy of it. What, I wondered, if the sum total of what people knew of the New Testament was just two chapters? What would they be? By the time we had reached Kampala, Luke 24 and Acts 2 had clearly come into view: two key chapters covering the climax of Luke's gospel and the effective launch of Jesus' church, which I sensed could act together as a brilliant clear window into the whole of the rest of the New Testament.

The Jesus Way is the result: A book in 2 parts, learning first from Jesus himself in Luke 24 and then from his apostles in Acts 2 about what it means to follow Jesus – his way.

Part 1: 'Learning from Jesus himself' consists of the NIV text of Luke 24 and then six chapters:

- Enjoy Jesus' Resurrection;
- Accept His Forgiveness;
- Welcome His Spirit;
- Feed on His Scriptures;
- Participate in His Meal;
- Bear Witness to His Reign.

Part 2: 'Learning from the Apostles,' consists of the NIV text of Acts 2 and six further chapters:

- Share with Jesus' People;
- Worship His Majesty ;
- Follow His Teaching;
- Live His Life;
- Resist His Enemy;
- Trust him for the Future.

These two main parts are followed by an Epilogue and three appendixes:

- Jesus of Nazareth: What makes Him unique?
- The Resurrection of Jesus: Can we be sure?
- Baptism for Jesus' followers: Why is it important?

The book can be used by individuals, but it is also designed to be used by church study groups. To support study groups this new edition is accompanied by a set of new materials consisting of short videos, a Participant's Workbook with questions and activities for groups and individuals and additional Teacher's resources with lecture outlines and presentation slides.

Martin's opinion:

This is a book with a proven track record of helping people to understand what the Bible has to teach us about the basics of Christian discipleship. As Greg Downes has written 'the guide is wonderfully holistic – including chapters that champion the centrality of the cross, the revelation of Scripture, the power of the Holy Spirit and the importance of the sacraments.' As Walker himself notes, it would make an excellent resource for people who have been on courses such as *Alpha* and *Christianity Explored* and who now want to understand more about the nature of Christian discipleship as well as for those preparing for baptism or confirmation. It could also be used as the basis for a church weekend away, or for training lay leaders so that they can then teach others.

The additional new group resources make this new version even more useful. In today's world it is vital that the Church fosters robust disciples who will be able to stand firm in the face of an increasingly hostile world because they know what they believe and why. *The Jesus Way* has the potential to be a key tool in achieving this end.

Commendations:

Wallace Benn comments:

I am really excited by this revised edition of *The Jesus Way*. Having taught it myself, I can commend it confidently as the best discipleship training course available, and when used it will prove to be a great blessing to the Church.

M B Davie 27.2.2020