

# Latimer Trust

## Monthly Reading List – March 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
Matthew Barrett	<i>Canon, Covenant and Christology: Rethinking Jesus and The Scriptures of Israel</i>	This book is an important contribution to Evangelical thinking about the authority of Scripture. Well worth reading and sharing with others.
Elijah Hixon and Peter Gurry (eds)	<i>Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism</i>	This collection of essays will be very useful to students who want an up to date introduction to the issues surrounding the reliability of the New Testament text. It will also be very useful to ministers and others engaged in Christian apologetics.
Bruce Longenecker	<i>In Stone and Story: Early Christianity in the Roman World</i>	This is a textbook that will be extremely useful for all students beginning their study of the New Testament and also for anyone who wants to refresh or deepen their understanding of the world which the New Testament addresses.
Alister McGrath	<i>Narrative Apologetics: Sharing the Relevance, Joy, and Wonder of the Christian Faith</i>	This book will be of great interest and value to anyone who is concerned with the issue of how to commend the truth of the Christian gospel in the twenty-first century.
N T Wright	<i>History and Eschatology: Jesus and the Promise of Natural Theology</i>	This is an important argument that all Christians who have the necessary time and intellectual capacity need to engage with. If you read only one big theology book this year you should seriously consider making <i>History and Eschatology</i> that book.

Matthew Barrett, *Canon, Covenant and Christology: Rethinking Jesus and The Scriptures of Israel*, Apollos, ISBN 978-1-78359-544-0, £16.99 (e edition also as available).

Overview:

Matthew Barrett is Associate Professor of Christian Theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in the United States. In his new book in the IVP New Studies in Biblical Theology series he addresses the question of where, as Christians, we should look in order to understand the nature of the Bible.

As Barrett notes, the obvious answer is to turn to what is said about Scripture by Paul:

Naturally, one turns to the apostle Paul. After all, few define what Scripture is with such precision and clarity so that the church understands how God has communicated and what authority they are to live by as followers of Christ. As Paul says to Timothy, and by extension to the Christian church, 'All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work' (2 Tim. 3:16–17). On the basis of Paul's words, it is lucid what Scripture is and what it is designed to accomplish. From Paul's epistles one is able to put forward inspiration itself with confidence, as well as Scripture's corollary attributes.

However, he writes, basing one's approach to Scripture on what is said by Paul creates a problem:

The problem is, when one encounters Jesus and the Gospels, one is hard pressed to find such an explicit approach as Paul's to Timothy. The evangelical turns to the person at the core of the Christian faith, Jesus Christ, whose authority as the incarnate God-man is rivalled by none, and searches for a comparable proof text to 2 Timothy 3:16–17 (or, if one were to consider Peter, 2 Peter 1:21). In doing so, one walks away disappointed and perplexed that Jesus could be so silent on the nature of Scripture. Here is the Son of God himself, the Messiah, the Christ, the one who establishes the new covenant, on whom all the Scriptures of Israel depend, and no statement equivalent to Paul's (or Peter's) can be found on his lips, at least one that is as theologically specific, as to Scripture's own ontology.

The purpose of Barrett's book is to address this problem and its argument is that the problem disappears if one reads the Gospels on their own terms:

The relative (though not absolute) absence of direct reflection on Scripture's ontology by Jesus and the Gospel writers, however, need not tempt the evangelical to despair or retreat into canonical discontinuity. For this study will argue that Jesus and the apostles have just as convictional a doctrine of Scripture, but it will be discovered only if one reads the Gospels within their own canonical horizon and covenantal context. The nature of Scripture that Jesus and the Gospel writers presuppose may not be addressed directly, but manifests itself powerfully when one reads the words of Jesus and the Gospel writers within the Old Testament's promise-fulfilment pattern and typological tapestry.

That means the interpreter must look not for extended didactic sermons or parables from Jesus on the inspiration of Scripture. Instead, the Gospel writers intend the interpreter to pay attention to the way Jesus sees his own life, death and resurrection – indeed, his own filial and messianic identity – as the fulfilment of the covenant promises and typological patterns foreshadowed in the Old Testament. The Gospel writers want their readers to witness who Christ is and what he does so that their eyes may be opened to the grand scheme of the divine author who planned this redemptive story from start to finish.

Through the eyes of the Evangelists the reader learns that the covenant promises Yahweh made through the Law and the Prophets have been fulfilled in the person and work of Christ, and that is a claim not imposed on Jesus by the Gospel writers but a claim Jesus himself heralds. For that reason, nothing demonstrates Scripture's divine origin and trustworthy nature more than the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the advent of the Son of God the Word has become flesh (John 1:14), announcing to Jew and Gentile alike that God has come through on his inscripturated, covenant word.

Moreover, contends Barrett, this argument is further substantiated if one examines:

... the way Jesus fulfils the Scriptures in his redemptive mission. To be more specific, it is the redemptive, covenant obedience of Christ that secures a righteousness for all those who trust in Christ. But an obedience to what exactly? Answer: an obedience to the Scriptures. For they are the covenant treaty of the new covenant Mediator. By looking to the manner in which Jesus accomplishes redemption – that is, his self-conscious covenant obedience to the Scriptures – one also discovers Jesus' own attitude towards the Scriptures. What that means for the interpreter of the Gospels is key: one need not pedal through the Gospels looking for a proof text about Scripture's ontology. Rather, one should primarily look to the mission of the Son to discover the attitude of the Son towards the Scriptures of Israel. It is in Jesus' humble trust in and obedience to the Scriptures for the sake of securing eternal life for the believer that the interpreter's eyes are opened to just what Jesus believes these Scriptures to be: the word of God.

Finally, the witness of the Gospels to the divine identity of Jesus is also germane to the issue:

For if he is who he says he is – the eternal Son of God – then what he says about the Scriptures cannot be dismissed. If he appears to speak with authority concerning the Scriptures, it is because he is their original, divine author as the pre-existent Son of God. His divine identity, then, is of no little significance. Establishing his divinity is instrumental to a faith that submits itself to the Bible Jesus read, a faith that seeks understanding from none other than the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

All this might seem to support the authority of the Old Testament, but to leave the New Testament out of the picture. However, Barrett addresses this point by arguing that what we find in Scripture is a word-act-word understanding of divine revelation. To quote Barrett again, what we find in the Gospels is that:

Jesus assumes that the history of Israel and the Scriptures is defined by this word-act-word revelation. What the prophets foretold and foreshadowed is brought to fulfilment in Jesus and Jesus and his apostles provide the authoritative divinely inspired and canonical interpretation of that word-act fulfilment.

The New Testament has divine authority because it is the written form of that divinely inspired and canonical interpretation.

Martin's opinion:

This book is an important contribution to Evangelical thinking about the authority of Scripture. It shows that what is said about the authority of the Old Testament in 2 Timothy 3:16 is supported by what the Gospels tell us about who Jesus was and is and what he came to do. As Barrett shows, the Gospels are clear that Jesus, God incarnate, believed that the Scriptures of the Old Testament carried God's own authority, which was why he came to fulfil them in order to bring about the salvation of the world. Furthermore, they also testify to Jesus' conviction that his words, and the subsequent words of the apostles, would form the divinely inspired interpretation of his saving acts in fulfilment of the Old Testament. The Gospels themselves therefore show that the concept of an authoritative, two part, divinely inspired Canon of Scripture is not a later addition to Christian thinking, but can be traced back to Jesus himself and therefore carries God's own authority. Well worth reading and sharing with others.

Commendations:

Don Carson comments:

In a wide-ranging discussion, Matthew Barrett explores [biblical theology] from the perspective of the Gospels, deploying interesting and stimulating insight that will certainly be picked up and developed by many pastors and theologians. Jesus himself ties together the old and new covenants. He fulfills the Scriptures, but effectively does so only by being obedient to them. The dynamic casts fresh light not only on Christ, but on the Scriptures themselves.

Elijah Hixson and Peter Gurry (eds), *Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism*, IVP Academic, ISBN 978-0-83085-257-4, £20.97 (e edition also available).

Overview:

Elijah Hixson is junior research associate in New Testament Text and Language at Tyndale House, Cambridge, and Peter Gurry is assistant professor of New Testament and co-director of the Text & Canon Institute at Phoenix Seminary in the United States. The new book which they have edited is a collection of essays which is designed to counter the myths and mistakes made by well-meaning Christian apologists when they attempt to defend the reliability of the text of the New Testament.

As Hixson and Gurry explain in their introductory chapter to this collection, the background to the problem that this collection seeks to address is the fact that the issue of the reliability of the New Testament text has become more prominent in recent years. In their words:

One challenge to the Bible that has risen to new prominence is the claim that we can't trust the New Testament because we do not even know what it says. This, we are told, is the case because the manuscripts – handwritten copies of the New Testament – are so corrupt from miscopying that we simply cannot know what the original text was. As Bart Ehrman, the scholar whose bestselling book *Misquoting Jesus* has done more than any other to bring this issue to the forefront, has said, 'How does it help us to say that the Bible is the inerrant word of God if in fact we do not have the words that God inerrantly inspired, but only the words copied by scribes – sometimes correctly but sometimes (many times) incorrectly?' For Ehrman the answer is clear: it is not much help at all, a conclusion contributed to his much-publicized loss of evangelical faith.

In response to the arguments and others who have followed in his footsteps Christian apologists have responded by arguing that the text of the New Testament can be relied upon. Unfortunately, argue Hixson and Gurry, such apologists 'often repeat bad or outdated arguments from other authors' and in many cases this means that:

...the treatment ends up worse than the ailment: arguments meant to encourage confidence in the Bible make it look untrustworthy through ignorance, negligence, or worse. This is troubling for those of us who love the Bible and want to know whether it can be trusted.

The purpose of the new collection of essays is to address this problem by attempting to bridge the gap between critical scholarship and those writing for a popular audience:

We do not write primarily for other textual critics; they will know most of what is presented here. Nor is our primary concern to answer Christianity's critics. Although some of that naturally occurs in what follows, others have already done that job ably. Instead we write primarily as a self-corrective to Christian speakers and writers. For them and for their audiences, we want to offer an up to date responsible guide to understanding the remarkable history of the New Testament text.

In order to achieve this goal Hixson and Gurry have brought together a team of fourteen younger scholars who are 'all actively involved in academic scholarship of the text of Christian documents.' The essays produced by these scholars are in 'three broad categories.' The essays in the first category look at the issue of what we know about the manuscripts of the New Testament. The essays in the second category then look at how the text of the New Testament was copied and the significance of the variations in the text introduced by those who did the copying. Finally, the essays in the third category look at patristic citations of the New Testament, the formation of the New Testament canon and ancient and modern translations of the New Testament text.

Martin's opinion:

This collection of essays will be very useful to students at universities and theological colleges who want an up to date introduction to the issues surrounding the reliability of the New Testament text. It will also be very useful to ministers and others engaged in Christian apologetics by showing them both the mistakes they need to avoid when defending text of the New Testament and also the good reasons there are for thinking that 'God has given his people a text that is more than reliable enough to know the saving work that he has accomplished through Jesus Christ.'

'Good scholarship is our friend' is a principle that is generally applicable to the defence of the Christian faith and this collection shows what good scholarship looks like in relation to the study of the text of the New Testament.

Commendations:

Peter Head writes:

I personally don't think that you can defend the truth and accuracy of Scripture as the Word of God with untruths and inaccuracies. So I welcome this book that contains an enormous amount of useful information on the text of the New Testament in a form aimed to help people involved in apologetics. Occasionally there is some tough love when mistakes and problems are highlighted, but the aim is always to improve the reader's understanding of the New Testament and thus their witness to the person of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Scriptures that tell his story.

Bruce Longenecker, *In Stone and Story: Early Christianity in the Roman World*, Baker Academic, ISBN 978-1-5409-6067-2, £23.99 (e edition also available).

Overview:

Bruce W. Longenecker is Professor of Religion at Baylor University in the United States and the author of numerous books on the New Testament. His new book is a textbook designed to introduce students of the New Testament to the Greco-Roman world of the first century through a study of the remains uncovered at the towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum which were destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD.

As Longenecker explains in his introductory chapter, the starting point for his book is the fact Christianity:

...began to get a foothold in a world very different from our own. It told its stories in a context far removed from the twenty-first century. Appreciation for the contributions of early Christian voices to the articulation of human meaning grows when those voices are heard in relation to their own world – the Greco-Roman world of the first century. That world was animated by a tournament of narratives about the world and its supposed deities. It was in relation to that tournament that a small number of Jesus-followers began to tell stories alongside the many others there were already on offer. Arguably, if Christian stories can contribute to the quest for meaning in contexts other than the first-century world, their potential is augmented when those stories are informed by an understanding of their significance within their original context

As he goes on to explain, there are two standard methods to introduce students to the first-century world:

(1) the study of ancient classical texts and (2) the study of archaeological discoveries from that ancient world. This book primarily adopts the second of these – exploring the material culture of the Roman age through the illumination provided by the archaeological site of Pompeii, with assistance from Pompeii's sister town, Herculaneum (and at times artifacts from nearby first-century Vesuvian villas). Literature from the Roman age will be referenced, occasionally, in instances when it significantly aids interpretation of the material evidence of the two Vesuvian towns.

The way that Longenecker uses the evidence from these towns is by:

Highlighting selected Vesuvian artifacts that best illustrate aspects of the Roman world and that, in turn, impact our understanding of early Christian texts and phenomena. Pompeii and Herculaneum were, after all, urban centers vibrantly alive at the very time that the early Jesus-movement was first getting some traction in urban centers of the Roman world. The Vesuvian remains are a treasure trove of life from two urban centers and various rural villas of the first century CE. They access that ancient world in a way that supplements the great literary texts of Greek and Latin writers with the everyday life of ordinary people who would otherwise be largely invisible to us. Moreover, Vesuvian artifacts reveal Greco-Roman contexts in an organic interrelated fashion; the inner sinews connecting first-century urban culture are on display at Vesuvius' base in a fashion unequalled at any other ancient site. In short, when it comes to understanding the world of the first century, no other urban site offers anything close to the Vesuvian resources of Pompeii and Herculaneum.

The book is in three parts

Part 1 'Protocols of Engagement' introduces what the book is about, explains how the quest to achieve social status was the key factor in the life of people in the first-century world, and lays out the 'tools' that help us to understand the evidence we have from that world.

Part 2 'Protocols of Popular Devotion' explores first-century Greco-Roman religion.

Part 3 'Protocols of Social Prominence' looks at how people acquired and displayed social status.

Part 4 'Protocols of Household Effectiveness' considers how first-century households were organized and operated.

Throughout the book, Longenecker relates the evidence from Pompeii and Herculaneum to texts from the New Testament so that students can begin to see the connections between the two.

The book also includes discussion questions, maps, and 175 colour photographs and has links to additional digital material that is available through Textbook eSources.

Martin's opinion:

The purpose of Longenecker's book is to provide an 'interpretative bridge' that will help students to understand the first-century world better and thereby also understand the New Testament better. It succeeds excellently in achieving this objective. This is a textbook that will be extremely useful for all students beginning their study of the New Testament and also for anyone who wants to refresh or deepen their understanding of the world which the New Testament addresses in order to more accurately understand what the New Testament writers were saying to their world and how this then relates to us today. Highly recommended.

Commendations:

Paula Fredricksen comments:

    Toggling between Roman urban culture (as mediated through archaeological evidence) and various forms of the early Jesus-movement (as mediated through New Testament texts), Bruce Longenecker provides a lively introduction to the formative social, material, and moral world of the early Christians.

Alistair McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics: Sharing the Relevance, Joy, and Wonder of the Christian Faith*, Baker Books, ISBN 978-0-80107-577-3, £11.99 (e and audio editions also available).

Overview:

Alistair McGrath is the Andreas Idreos Professor of Science and Religion at Oxford University and director of the Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion. He has written numerous books on Christian doctrine, Church history, science and religion and Christian apologetics. As he explains in the introduction, the purpose of his new book is to:

... introduce and commend narrative apologetics – that is to say, an approach to affirming, defending, and explaining the Christian faith by telling stories. It sets out to explore how these stories can open up important ways of communicating and commending the gospel, enabling it to be understood, connecting it with the realities of human experience, and challenging other stories that are told about the world and ourselves. The story of Jesus Christ, memorably and accessibly recounted in the Gospels, is capable of grasping our attention and stimulating our thinking – and rethinking – about ourselves and our world

Put simply, this book is an invitation to re-discover something that ought never to have been forgotten – the power of narratives to capture the imagination, and thus to render their mind receptive to the truth that they enfold and express. If C S Lewis and J R R Tolkien are right in their belief that God has shaped the human mind and imagination to be receptive to stories, and that these stories are echoes or fragments of the Christian ‘grand story,’ a significant theological case can be made for affirming and deploying such an approach to apologetics.

The book is in seven chapters

In his first chapter McGrath begins his book by introducing what the concept of narrative apologetics involves.

In his second chapter he looks at the origins and development of the concept of ‘narrative theology’ during the twentieth century, follows Tolkien in suggesting that the human capacity to create stories is an aspect of human beings being made in the image of God, and considers how a narrative approach helped C S Lewis to not only understand but cope with the challenge of human suffering.

In his third chapter he explores how a narrative approach can help apologists to meet objections (such as God being a human projection), to explain the significance of things (such as the significance of the incarnation) and to translate difficult concepts (such as sin) in terms that people can understand.

In his fourth chapter he looks at four biblical examples of using narrative to enable people to perceive theological truth – the story of the Exodus, the story of the Exile in Babylon, the story of Jesus as told in the Gospels, and Jesus’ parable of the pearl of great price.

In his fifth chapter he sets out three key strategies for narrative apologetics – ‘telling a better story,’ ‘seeing the Christian story as a metanarrative’ and ‘offering criticism of rival narratives.’ He also set out three criteria for the relevance of narrative apologetics, namely that it should offer a realistic account of our world, create space for the reader to see themselves in the story and help make sense of our existence as human beings.

In his sixth chapter he looks at how people’s personal narratives, such as the stories of St Augustine and Chuck Colson, can embody meaning and thus be helpfully used in apologetics, and how the Christian narrative provides answers to the four big questions about the meaning of human existence – Who am I? Do I matter? Why am I here? Can I make a difference?

Finally, in his seventh chapter he looks at using biblical, personal and cultural narratives to convey the truth of the Christian message.

Martin’s opinion:

This book will be of great interest and value to anyone who is concerned with the issue of how to commend the truth of the Christian gospel in the twenty-first century. As McGrath says ‘In the 21st century, it’s not enough to

show that Christianity is true. Apologists are tasked with the burden of proving how the truths of Christianity relate to and work in individual lives.' His exploration of the nature and importance of narrative apologetics shows how it can provide apologists with powerful tools for undertaking this challenging calling. The classical rational arguments for the truth of the Christian faith will always remain an indispensable part of apologetics, but as McGrath explains, stories have a key role to play as well.

Commendations:

Tanya Walker declares:

A compelling call to resist a reductionist rationality and to enter into the 'imaginative embrace' of the Christian faith. Read this book to be envisioned again about the expansiveness of the Christian story and to be given practical insight into how we might 'out-narrate' the stories of our cultures with the better story of Christ.

N T Wright, *History and Eschatology: Jesus and the Promise of Natural Theology*, Baylor University Press, ISBN 978-1-48130-962-2, £33.99 (paperback and e editions also available).

Overview:

The Gifford Lectures are a prestigious series of academic lectures delivered annually at the universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, St. Andrews and Aberdeen. They were established by a bequest from Lord Gifford and their stated purpose in terms of his bequest is to 'promote and diffuse the study of Natural Theology in the widest sense of the term – in other words, the knowledge of God.'

N T Wright, now the Senior Research Fellow at Wycliffe Hall, gave the Gifford Lectures for 2018 at the University of Aberdeen, and *History and Eschatology* is the published form of those lectures.

In his Preface Wright sets out the various different understandings of what the term 'natural theology' means and states that in his view:

... underneath all these various ways of understanding 'natural theology' there lies the great theological and philosophical challenge of talking about God and the world and the relation between them.

As a biblical scholar, he says, he saw his role in giving the Gifford lectures as being to see whether a biblically based theology might offer some 'fresh parameters' within which this challenge 'would appear in a different light.'

His basic argument is that the resurrection of Jesus gives us a new basis for understanding the relationship between God and the world. In his words:

... with Easter, the raising of Jesus from the dead, we are faced with the renewal of creation which by redemptive transformation, constitutes the *revalorization of the original creation itself*. The new world, brought to birth at Easter, is neither a mere adjustment within the present world nor that totally new replacement of the present world with something quite different (as was widely assumed when it was held that Jesus and his first followers believe that the present world would end in order to make way for the 'Kingdom of heaven '). There is continuity as well as discontinuity between the old and the new and between the modes of knowing necessary for understanding the one and the other. Easter says the divine 'yes' to the original creation, affirming in a new way, through the new kind of knowledge required of this new kind of world, those inferences that were already drawn from the world in the biblical and cognate traditions.

To 'revalorize' means to give new value to, so what Wright is saying is that resurrection affirms the existing created order in a fresh way. It shows that this world is indeed God's world, as the Old Testament and subsequent Jewish thought always taught that it was, and that God has not given up on it, but it is at work transforming it into the world he intended it to be all along.

Wright then further argues that the resurrection opens up a 'new public world in which the questions raised by humans within the present creation can be seen as providential signposts to God.' These signposts, however, are 'broken signposts.' This is because: 'The highest and best aspects of the human vocation, from 'justice' to 'love', all create paradoxes and sharp disjunctions. None will lead us to utopia, let alone to God.' According to Wright this is where the cross comes into the picture, since the cross tells us that God is present precisely at the point 'where human vocational instincts might be thought to point 'up' to God, but fail to do so... where justice is denied, love betrayed and so on.'

The role of the Church, empowered by the Spirit is 'to anticipate by freshly embodying the previously 'broken' signposts, the promised time when God will be all in all.' In other words, the Church is called to embody in a new way the human vocation to love, justice and so forth and by so doing point to God and the truth that the time is coming when 'the natural world of time and space will be rescued from his corruption in decay and transformed by the glorious divine presence.' By fulfilling this vocation the Church creates a new form of natural theology, a new set of signposts pointing to God. To quote Wright again:

The signposts must come to life afresh. When we fight for justice and stand up for the oppressed, we are knowing God, making him known, demonstrating by the spirit his own passion for justice. When we delight

in beauty and create more of it, God the glad creator is displayed and honoured. When we cherish freedom and share it; when we speak truly, and especially when we speak new creation into being by articulating fresh truth, the God of Genesis and Exodus is present, celebrated and known. When we exercise power humbly and wisely, and hold to account those who do otherwise, we are living out publicly the power of the cross and demonstrating that the innate human vocation, given in the creation of image-bearers, was a true signpost to the reality of God and the world. When we worship and pray, and above all when we enter into wise, self-giving and fruitful relationships, we are knowing and honouring the God of creation and making him known. There will be grief in all this. There will be love in all this. There will thus be knowledge: we will be engaged in the true, image-bearing 'natural theology'. Those who discern the dawn must awaken the world.

#### Martin's opinion:

These lectures are the mature reflections of a great scholar. They bring together the three great themes which Wright's books have been exploring for many years, history, eschatology and the mission of the Church. Wright's proposal is that study of the historical Jesus and the significance of his resurrection leads us to see this world as one which God has not abandoned, but as one into which God's promised future has already begun to break in, and to understand the mission of the Church as being to bear witness to this fact not only by its words, but by the way Christians live within the public sphere. This is an important argument that all Christians who have the necessary time and intellectual capacity need to engage with. If you read only one big theology book this year you should seriously consider making *History and Eschatology* that book.

#### Commendations:

John Behr writes:

*A tour de force*, placing history – and Jesus himself! – back at the heart of natural theology.