



Latimer Trust Monthly Reading List - December 2016

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
Chris Band	<i>On my knees: Rebuilding our confidence in prayer</i>	This is a very helpful book on prayer. It would make a good basis for a sermon series or for a discussion of prayer in an enquirers book or home group. To aid group discussion there is a web site with an accompanying study guide.
Oliver Crisp	<i>Saving Calvinism: Expanding the Reformed Tradition</i>	The great strength of this book is that it will help people with this necessary process of informed reflection. It not only explains the nature of the variety within the Reformed tradition but offers a reliable guide to the issues at stake.
Brendan Crowe	<i>The Last Adam: A Theology of the Obedient Life of Jesus in the Gospels</i>	This book is quite a demanding read, but those who have the willingness and the ability to work through it will be rewarded with a deeper appreciation both of the teaching of the Gospels and the saving importance of the life of Christ.
Mary Eberstadt	<i>It's dangerous to Believe: Religious Freedom and its Enemies</i>	This is a relatively short book, but it is comprehensive, based on reliable research and very readable. It is a book that should be read by anyone who wants to understand the challenge facing traditional Christian belief across the Western world, why this challenge exists and what needs to be done about it. People should buy this book, read it, and then encourage others to read it as well.
Mary Eberstadt	<i>How the West Really Lost God</i>	This is a book for everyone, whether a believer or not, who wants to understand the reasons for the current state of Western society. If you read one book about secularization this year this book should be it.
David Goodhew (ed)	<i>Growth and Decline in the Anglican Communion 1980 to the Present</i>	This book provides an invaluable resource for students and scholars seeking an understanding the past, present and future of worldwide Anglicanism. Not everyone will need or want to read it, but for students of the Anglican Communion this should now be seen as required reading.
Duncan Hamilton	<i>For the Glory: The Life of Eric Liddell</i>	This is a book that should be read by anyone who wants to understand what it means to respond to God by living a life of visible holiness. This a great biography of a truly great man.
Timothy Keller	<i>Hidden Christmas</i>	As in all his books, what Keller gives us here is readable biblical theology and what he writes will be a very useful resource for anyone called to preach or teach about the Christmas story. In addition, this would also be a good book to give to a serious enquirer who wants to know why Christmas is important from a Christian perspective.
Timothy Keller	<i>Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Sceptical</i>	Keller writes: 'If you think that Christianity doesn't hold much promise of making sense to a thinking person, then this book is for you. If you have friends or family who feel this way (and who in our society doesn't) this book should be full of interest for you and them as well.' This is an excellent, readable, primer in basic Christian apologetics that people need to buy, ponder, use, lend and give away. An invaluable resource.
Peter Mead	<i>Lost in Wonder: A Biblical Introduction to God's Great Marriage</i>	This book can be highly recommended to anyone who wants to understand how the theme of marital union runs central to the whole of Scripture. One writer has said the whole message of the Bible can be summed up in five words from God 'I want to marry you' and Mead shows us why this is true. This book is easily to read and would make an excellent basis for a sermon series or a series of home group sessions.

Chris Band, *On my knees: Rebuilding our confidence in prayer*, Monarch, ISBN 978-0857217752, £8.99 (e edition also available).

Martin's opinion:

This is a very helpful book on prayer. It would make a good basis for a sermon series or for a discussion of prayer in an enquirers book or home group. To aid group discussion there is a web site with an accompanying study guide.

Overview:

Chris Band is a Baptist minister in Oxford who has previously served with a number of missionary organisations.

The overarching idea underlying his new book is the importance of building a house of prayer. In his introduction he writes:

'In the Gospels, Jesus aspiration was that God's Temple might be known as a 'house of prayer.' And as his 'living temples' he wants no less for us. But if we desire a robust and enduring prayer life, we need a solid foundation. This consists both of who we perceive God to be (our 'doctrine of God') and also of how we understand him to be involved in our world (our 'model of providence').'

In line with this idea of building a house of prayer on a solid foundation Band's book is divided into four parts.

'We will begin in part one by examining our foundations for prayer. This will involve subjecting our current ideas to close scrutiny. But it is surely right, if we are disappointed with prayer, that we examine the correctness of our theology before questioning the goodness of God. In part two we will start building our 'house of prayer' by considering the impact that prayer has on us, on the world and even on God himself. Then in part three we will meet the 'occupants', for the house is a residence in which we not only know the company of God and one another but also the less-welcome company of the surrounding powers of evil. Finally, in part four we'll consider the 'house rules.' How are we to behave in this place? In what way, exactly, has Jesus taught us to pray?'

Band argues that we need to base our understanding of prayer in the twin facts that God is sovereign and that he allows us a genuine role in shaping what takes place. He asks us to consider whether God is not:

'...so powerful, so wise, so sovereign, that even with the spiritual and human forces opposing him, with the cards stacked against him, he is nevertheless able to build his kingdom and bring his children, with unfailing certainty, to a place of final and lasting triumph? *That* is true sovereignty! And that is why prayer is so vital. Not because it is just another facet of a predetermined plan but because in prayer we join with God in shaping the future to reach his goal, trusting in the sovereignty of the one who is able, with great skill, patience, and power, to work out everything 'in conformity with the purpose of his will' (Ephesians 1:11).'

He acknowledges that some prayers go unanswered but suggests that:

'Unanswered prayer need not be an irredeemably barren experience for us. It can remind us of our dependence on God, of our need for his daily grace. It can build within us a Christlikeness that might not otherwise have been achieved. And it can lead to a Spirit empowerment, as through our human weakness we encounter more of God's power. We may never, in this life, come to know the reason why some prayers remain unanswered. I suspect that the explanation may have more to do with being caught up in this old order of sin and death rather than being some specific design of God. But God is with us nevertheless as God who redeems, and so we keep faith in him, even as we cry out, 'How long O Lord.'"

Band further argues that God the Holy Trinity prays for us and with us and that we need to pray with other Christians and against the powers of darkness. Finally, he notes that the 'house rules' for prayer taught by Jesus are that we should pray with faith, with persistence and with desire.

This is a very helpful book on prayer. It is rooted in the teaching of Scripture and tackles the key questions that many Christians have about prayer, but are sometimes afraid to ask such as Is prayer wasted effort? Is God less involved in the world than we might wish? Is his will going to be done anyway, whether or not we pray? It explains how we can both affirm the sovereignty of God and yet also affirm that our prayers do actually make a difference. It also explains who we pray with, who we pray against, and what the character of our praying should be. It would make a good basis for a sermon series or for a discussion of prayer in an enquirers book or home group. To aid group discussion there is a web site with an accompanying study guide.

Commendations:

Chris Wright has written: 'Biblically rich, and readably practical, this is a most helpful and encouraging companion on the journey of prayer.'

Oliver Crisp, *Saving Calvinism: Expanding the Reformed Tradition*, Inter-Varsity Press US, ISBN 978-0830851751, £14.66 (e edition also available).

Martin's Opinion:

The great strength of this book is that it will help people with the necessary process of informed reflection. It not only explains the nature of the variety within the Reformed tradition but offers a reliable guide to the issues at stake.

Overview:

Oliver D. Crisp is professor of systematic theology in the School of Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California and the author of a number of significant studies in the fields of systematic and historical theology. His new book starts with the observation that 'many young American evangelical Christians have become besotted with Reformed theology.' However, in his view many of these young Evangelicals are unaware of the breadth of the Reformed tradition.

He says that they are like people who have inherited a grand old mansion 'full of rooms filled with the most fascinating and useful things, and though there is good reason for them to open up the whole house, exploring all its nooks and crannies, they prefer to stay within the small confines of the part of the mansion they know best.'

His book 'sets out to address this matter by reacquainting modern Reformed readers with more of their theological heritage' on the grounds that 'getting to know the mansion that is Reformed theology better will help Christians today to live fuller, more effective, and more theologically informed lives.' The book focuses on the Reformed teaching about salvation and looks at this in six chapters.

Chapter one looks at the question of the 'real shape of Calvinism' and argues that while the five points of the Synod of Dort (total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace and the perseverance of the saints) 'do indeed summarise much in Reformed thought there is reason to think that they do not represent the whole story. There is more to be said about what might count as properly Reformed.

Chapter two considers the belief 'that God ordains all things that come to pass' and 'sets out an account of the doctrine of election as a positive and helpful theological contribution, not something to be dreaded or rejected.'

Chapter three explores 'human free will and salvation' and suggests that 'it is a mistake to think that there is only one position on human free will in relation to God's ordination of all things that counts as 'the Reformed view.'"

Chapter four examines the relationship 'between Calvinism and universalism.' In dialogue with the work of Reformed theologians such as William Shedd, Benjamin Warfield and Karl Barth it argues 'that one can hold to a very optimistic version of particularism [the belief that a particular number of fallen humanity are saved through Christ] and still be within the bounds of received orthodoxy. It may even be that there is reason to hope for the salvation of all, even if we cannot say categorically that all are saved.'

Chapter five looks at nature of the atoning work of Christ. It 'lays out several alternative views of Christ's work found in Reformed thought' and then consider 'whether there is only one way to conceive the nature of the atonement or whether we should allow that there are a number of different 'windows' onto Christ's work that different doctrines of the atonement provide.'

Finally, chapter six looks at 'the extent of the atonement.' It notes many have believed that the only viable Reformed position is 'that Christ's atonement is intended for those whom God predestines to atonement alone, that is the elect.' However, it also notes that there is another Reformed position 'worthy of serious consideration' which is the belief known as 'hypothetical universalism' that holds that 'the atonement may be sufficient for all humanity but effective only for those whom God calls to eternal life.'

A concluding chapter then argues that what has been looked at in the earlier chapters shows 'that Calvinism is not nearly as narrow, let alone narrow-minded as some contemporary Christians seem to think. In fact, it is a tradition alive with different voices and views – just as one would expect given the importance of what is at stake.'

This is a book the will probably make some people very cross because they will not like Crisp challenging their belief that their take on the Reformed tradition is the only one that can possibly be considered correct. However, Crisp is undoubtedly right to claim that the Reformed tradition has actually been broader and more variegated than people often think and that if one is to be properly informed theologically one has to be aware of this breadth and variety and learn how to think critically about it. The great strength of this book is that it will help people with this necessary process of informed reflection. It not only explains the nature of the variety within the Reformed tradition but offers a reliable guide to the issues at stake. Even if in the end you conclude that the five points of Dort are correct Crisp will have done you a service by forcing you to think hard about why they are correct. For these reasons all those interested in Reformed theology, including Anglicans, will benefit from reading this book.

Commendation:

Kenneth J Stewart declares: 'Opinions will differ as to whether Calvinism indeed needs 'saving.' Yet in this book, Oliver Crisp admirably succeeds in demonstrating that the venerable house of Reformed theology contains unexplored rooms with which today's Calvinists need to become familiar. In page after page, it demonstrates lucid exposition of views that have been lost sight of, along with crystal-clear delineation of ideas needing to be distinguished. It also breathes an infectious charity.'

Brendan Crowe, *The Last Adam: A Theology of the Obedient Life of Jesus in the Gospels*, Baker Academic, ISBN 978-0-80109-626-6, £24.41 (e edition also available).

Martin's Opinion

This book is quite a demanding read, but those who have the willingness and the ability to work through it will be rewarded with a deeper appreciation both of the teaching of the Gospels and the saving importance of the life of Christ.

Overview:

Brandon Crowe is the associate professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary. In his new book he engages with the discussion that is currently taking place among theologians and New Testament scholars about how to understand what the Gospels have to tell us about the significance of the earthly life of Jesus. What was Jesus doing between his birth and death and how does this relate to our salvation?

As Crowe explains, the issue his book explores is:

‘What was it about the life of Jesus that was necessary for salvation—from the manger to the cross and everything in between? Do the Evangelists themselves give us any indications that this is a question they have in view as they write their Gospels?’

His argument is that they do. As he puts it:

‘In this volume I will argue that we find a shared perspective among the diversity of the four Gospels that the obedient life of Jesus—in its entirety—is vicarious and salvific in character. More specifically, I will argue that Jesus is portrayed in the Gospels as the last Adam whose obedience is necessary for God’s people to experience the blessings of salvation. In pursuit of this thesis, I will consider what the Gospels themselves say about the lifelong obedience of Jesus, which concomitantly involves considering how Jesus’s life and ministry are related to his passion. By concentrating on the Gospels I do not intend to imply that these are the only documents in the New Testament that speak to this issue. I do believe, however, that a focus on the Gospels qua Gospels is important because of the way they narrate the life of Jesus, and because their testimony to the significance of Jesus’s life for salvation has often not been given sufficient attention. Thus a sub-aim of this book is to help us read and interpret the Gospels theologically.’

Crowe's thesis is that the Gospels identify Jesus as the last Adam whose obedience recapitulates and overcomes the sin of the first Adam. He contends that Jesus's obedience is presented by the Gospel writers as the obedience of an anointed representative, which is counted vicariously on behalf of his people. Key topics which he explores in developing this thesis include Jesus's baptism and temptation, his fulfilment of Scripture, the necessity of his works, the binding of the strong man and the in-breaking of the kingdom, and Jesus's death and resurrection.

As well as presenting a close reading of the Gospels Crowe also discusses how his argument relates to the systematic theology and to the teaching of the Creeds, which are often thought to say little about Jesus's life.

The Last Adam is an important new study of the theology of the Gospels. It helps to correct any idea that the life of Jesus was simply a run up to his crucifixion and resurrection and lacks any soteriological significance of its own. It also shows that St. Paul's idea of Jesus as the second Adam overcoming the work of the first Adam through his vicarious obedience is not a Pauline peculiarity, but is something that is central to the teaching of all four Gospels. This book is quite a demanding read, but those who have the willingness and the ability to work through it will be rewarded with a deeper appreciation both of the teaching of the Gospels and the saving importance of the life of Christ. Both students and ministers will be able to learn much from this study.

Commendation:

Darrell L. Bock comments: ‘The issue of Jesus's relationship to Adam and whether the Savior's life, along with his death, was vicarious is a much-discussed, and sometimes debated, topic in theology. Brandon Crowe's *The Last Adam* presents a full walk through the issues tied to this discussion. It makes for fascinating reading as we come to reflect more on what Jesus's life and ministry may have been about.’

Mary Eberstadt, *It's dangerous to Believe: Religious Freedom and its Enemies*, Harper Collins, ISBN 978-0-06245-401-0, £18.99 (e edition also available).

Martin's Opinion:

This is a relatively short book, but it is comprehensive, based on reliable research and very readable. It is a book that should be read by anyone who wants to understand the challenge facing traditional Christian belief across the Western world, why this challenge exists and what needs to be done about it. People should buy this book, read it, and then encourage others to read it as well.

Overview:

Mary Eberstadt is an American Catholic essayist and social commentator who has written a number of important books that chart the changes that have taken place in Western society in general, and American society in particular, as a result of the sexual revolution and the growth of secularism.

The inspiration for this book is a meeting she attended in Denver in 2013 in which:

'People spoke of the anti-religious fusillade now riddling popular culture via movies, books, cartoons and related popular fare that denigrates people of faith. They spoke about the ongoing vilification of Christians, especially as 'haters' and 'bigots.' Some asked: What is a believer to do these days? Withdraw into tiny communities, as disparate thinkers have latterly urged, hoping like the monks of yesteryear to ride out a new dark age? Or should they instead stand tall as witnesses, and endure castigation in the mostly virulent public square? What about other options, like moving to other states or even other countries where religious people could live out their lives in peace – and where, if anywhere, did such place exist?

Or, as someone, somewhere in the mix put it, 'Where will we go?'

In Eberstadt's view:

'What's happening among Western religious believers today – the seismic shift represented by the question heard first in Denver three years ago – is like nothing that has happened before. Here were serious religious people wondering whether to go somewhere else. By 2016 in many influential cultural, political and intellectual precincts, Christianity for Christian has become the new scarlet letter.'

Eberstadt acknowledges that there is no 'moral equivalence' between the 'soft persecution of men and women of faith in the advanced nations' and the 'violent agonizing persecution' of Christian believers in other parts of the world. However she argues that: 'the fact that they are not being murdered in the streets, or driven from their homes does not make what is happening to today's Western Christians all right – not by the standards of free societies and certainly not by the purported secular-progressive standards of tolerance, diversity and freedom for all.'

Eberstadt's book is in five chapters. The first five chapters detail how recent laws (such as the Affordable Care Act in the United States), court decisions (such as the Supreme Court decision in favour of same sex 'marriage') and intimidation on university campuses and elsewhere threaten believers who fear losing their jobs, their communities, and their basic freedoms solely because of their convictions. In these chapters Eberstadt explains how Christian believers fear that religious universities and colleges will capitulate to aggressive secularist demands, that they and their families will be ostracized or will have to abandon their religion because of mounting social and financial penalties for believing, and that they will no longer be able to maintain charitable operations that help the sick and feed the hungry. The sixth chapter 'What is to be done; or, how to end a witch hunt' calls for a return to basic civility, of people respecting others and their beliefs and allowing these beliefs to be tested in the marketplace of ideas. When we make people we disagree with our enemies, it argues, we prevent open discussion and a common quest for truth.

This is a relatively short book (126 pages), but it is comprehensive, based on reliable research and very readable. It focuses on the situation in the United States, but also refers to examples from elsewhere in the Western world and what it says is directly applicable to the current situation in the United Kingdom. It is a book that should be read by anyone who wants to understand the challenge facing traditional Christian belief across the Western world, why this challenge exists and what needs to be done about it. People should buy this book, read it, and then encourage others to read it as well.

Commendation:

Robert George writes: 'The cultured despisers of religion are now the cultured despisers of religious freedom, too. In her terrific new book *It's Dangerous to Believe*, Mary Eberstadt exposes these tin pot Torquemadas. She has given friends of religious liberty and the rights of conscience a powerful new manifesto.'

Mary Eberstadt, *How the West Really Lost God*, Templeton Foundation Press, ISBN 978-1-59947-466-3, £13.92 (e edition also available).

Martin's Opinion:

This is a book for everyone, whether a believer or not, who wants to understand the reasons for the current state of Western society. If you read one book about secularization this year this book should be it.

Overview:

The question addressed by *How the West Really Lost God* is 'How and why Christianity really came to decline in important parts of the West.'

As Mary Eberstadt writes at the beginning of the book, what the book argues is that:

'...just about everyone working on this great puzzle has come up with some piece of the truth – and yet that one particular piece needed to hold the others together still has gone missing. Urbanization, industrialization, belief and disbelief, technology, shrinking population: yes, yes and yes to all these factors statistically and otherwise correlated with secularization. Yet, even taking them all into account, the picture remains incomplete, as chapter 2 goes to show. It is as if the modern mind has lined up all the different pieces on the collective table, only to press them together in a way that looks whole from a distance, but still leaves something critical out.'

As she goes on to say, her book is an attempt to supply the missing piece of the picture.

'It moves the human family from the periphery to the center of this debate over how and why Christianity exercises less influence over Western minds and hearts today than it did in the past. Its purpose is to offer an alternative account of what Nietzsche's madman really saw in what he called the 'tombs' (read, the cathedrals and churches) of Europe.'

The book's argument, she declares:

'...is that the Western record suggests that family decline is not merely a *consequence* of religious decline, as conventional thinking has understood that relationship. It also is plausible – and, I will argue, appears to be true – *that family decline in turn helps to power religious decline*. And if this way of augmenting the conventional explanation for the collapse of Christian faith in Europe is correct, then certain things, including some radical things, follow from it, as we shall see.'

The book is divided into three parts.

Part 1 (chapters 1-2) reviews the conventional explanations for the decline of Western Christianity and outlines the problems with them.

Part 2 (chapters 3-7) notes the historical fact that the decline of the family and the decline of Christianity have gone hand in hand, explains why the theory that there is a causal link between them solves problems that other theories of secularization leave un-answered and explores 'just what the mechanisms might be that make family and faith so intricately bound together.'

Part 3 (chapter 8-9 and the conclusion) looks at 'the practical question of why anyone should care about the mechanism of secularization in the first place' and considers what Eberstadt's new theory might 'suggest about the future of both Western Christianity and the Western family.' The conclusion argues that everyone, whether religious or not, has 'a dog of one kind or another in the fight over secularization' because the decline of the family linked to the decline of religion has led to the profound economic and social challenges currently facing the West as a result of the fall in the birth rate and the consequent aging of the population.

How the West Really Lost God is both a startlingly original contribution to the debate about the causes of secularization and a powerful argument as to why secularization is a matter which should be of concern to everyone. It is a book for everyone, whether a believer or not, who wants to understand the reasons for the current state of Western society. It is a reminder that the decline of the traditional family has tremendously significant social and economic consequences and a warning to the churches that in failing to defend the traditional family and traditional sexual morality they have helped to bring about their own decline. If you read one book about secularization this year this book should be it.

Commendation:

Mary Anne Glendon comments: 'Mary Eberstadt's account of the synergistic relationship between the fracturing of the family and declining religiosity is both chilling and utterly convincing. No theorist of secularization has come close to Eberstadt in sociological insight or explanatory power.'

David Goodhew (ed) *Growth and Decline in the Anglican Communion 1980 to the Present*, Routledge, ISBN 978-1472433640, £24.99 (e edition also available).

Martin's Opinion:

The detailed studies in this book will help anyone who is interested to begin to understand what is really going on in the Anglican Communion and to grasp the complexity of what is taking place. As such it provides an invaluable resource for students and scholars seeking an understanding the past, present and future of worldwide Anglicanism. Not everyone will need or want to read this book, but for students of the Anglican Communion this should now be seen as required reading.

Overview:

This new volume in the Routledge 'Studies in Contemporary Ecclesiology' series has come out of Cranmer Hall's Centre for Church Growth Research and is edited by David Goodhew, the Director of the Centre for Church Growth Research at Cranmer. It is the result of the work of a team of international experts and is the first comprehensive study of the growth and decline that has taken place in the Anglican Communion in the years since 1980.

As David Goodhew explains in his introduction:

'Alongside growth, the Communion has experienced serious division and other difficulties in recent years. An understanding of its patterns of growth and decline is crucial to understanding the current and future trajectories of global Anglicanism. As one of the main Christian denominations, and understanding of Anglicanism's growth and decline in recent decades is also significant for wider debates concerning secularisation in the modern world.'

The volume begins with an introductory chapter that sets the scene for the study and summarises its overall conclusions. Chapter 2 then provides an overall summary of the state of global Anglicanism by two leading religious demographers, Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo. Chapters 3-14 give twelve case studies in growth and decline drawn from Africa (Ghana, Nigeria, Congo, Kenya and South Africa), Asia (India, Singapore, South Korea and Australia), the Americas (the USA and parts of South America) and from Europe (the Church of England). The volume concludes with an Afterword from Bishop Graham Kings, Mission Theologian in the Anglican Communion.

As Goodhew further notes:

'Many assumptions have been made about growth and decline in the global Anglican Communion, despite limited research on the subject. It is widely and rightly stated that Anglicanism has shifted in the last 50 years to being a church predominantly found in the developing world. But it is less recognised that there is great variation *between* different parts of the developing world. There is a right recognition that Anglicanism in many parts of the west has declined, but, again, the variation *within* the west is less well understood. Some parts of western Anglicanism have declined dramatically, some modestly, and in a few places western Anglicanism has grown. This volume offers detailed research which brings greater clarity to discussions about Anglican growth and decline.'

The key word in this last quotation is 'clarity.' There has been much heat in recent years in discussions about Anglican growth and decline, but comparatively little light. This volume helps to provide light. The detailed studies it contains will help anyone who is interested to begin to understand what is really going on in the Anglican Communion and to grasp the complexity of what is taking place. As such it provides an invaluable resource for students and scholars seeking an understanding the past, present and future of worldwide Anglicanism. Not everyone will need or want to read this book, but for students of the Anglican Communion this should now be seen as required reading.

Commendation:

Philip Jenkins comments: 'This is a truly valuable book. In a collection of outstanding essays, the contributors seek to find firm ground for statements about growth and decline in the Anglican Communion, one of the world's largest religious institutions. At every stage, what they find repeatedly challenges conventional assumptions, and also raises fundamental questions that demand to be applied to other global churches. This is truly eye-opening. I cannot speak too highly of this excellent volume.'

Duncan Hamilton, *For the Glory: The Life of Eric Liddell*, Doubleday, ISBN 978-0-85752-259-7, £20.00 (e edition also available).

Martin's Opinion:

Liddell was without doubt a twentieth century saint. He was a man who made the presence of God visible to others by the way he lived. Hamilton does justice to Liddell by explaining just why this was the case. This is a book that should be read by anyone who wants to understand what it means to respond to God by living a life of visible holiness. This a great biography of a truly great man.

Overview:

Eric Liddell is best known today through the account of his gold medal winning performance in the 400 metres at Paris Olympics of 1924 immortalised in the film *Chariots of Fire*. However, that victory was only a very small part of a life dedicated to the glory of God.

In this new biography of Liddell the sports writer Duncan Hamilton tells the story of the whole of that life and makes clear how for Liddell the service of God involved a consistent pattern of service and sacrifice that led him not only (as is well known) to refuse to run on the Sabbath, but also led him to turn down the opportunity to make money out of his Olympic success in order to undertake missionary work in China, to be happy to turn his back on the prospect of further Olympic glory at Los Angeles in 1928, and to endure separation from his wife and family in order to fulfil his missionary calling, even to the extent of remaining in China during World War II when they were evacuated to Canada.

Hamilton movingly records how Liddell became the moral bedrock of the internment camp at Weihsien where he eventually died prematurely of a brain tumour. He argues that Liddell's grates race was not the one in Paris in 1924, but a race that he ran in Weihsien in 1944 to maintain morale even though he was suffering from a terminal illness. In his view it is this race 'a couple of minutes in faraway corner of a faraway country that show the essential Liddell, a stricken man running because it was the right thing to do.' Hamilton also explains how Liddell's daughters eventually came to accept that he had to be in the camp at Weihsien. As his daughter Heather put it 'My Father was meant to be in that camp. His whole life was designed to either care for or to inspire people.'

Liddell was without doubt a twentieth century saint. He was a man who made the presence of God visible to others by the way he lived. Hamilton does justice to Liddell by explaining just why this was the case. This is a book that should be read by anyone who wants to understand what it means to respond to God by living a life of visible holiness. This a great biography of a truly great man.

Commendation:

The *Sunday Times* reviewer wrote:

'Eric Liddell deserves a definitive biography. This is it.'

Timothy Keller, *Hidden Christmas*, Hodder and Stoughton, ISBN 978-1473642584, £12.99 (e edition also available).

Martin's Opinion:

If you are looking for a scholarly commentary on the birth narratives in Matthew or Luke, or a verse by verse exposition of them, then this is not the book for you. However, if you want a clear and readable account of the gifts a gracious God gives us through the birth of Christ and how we can receive them for ourselves then you will find this book immensely helpful. As in all his books, what Keller gives us here is readable biblical theology and what he writes will be a very useful resource for anyone called to preach or teach about the Christmas story. In addition, this would also be a good book to give to a serious enquirer who wants to know why Christmas is important from a Christian perspective.

Overview:

Timothy Keller is the senior pastor at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and is one of today's most highly respected and widely read Christian authors. His new book *Hidden Christmas* is an expanded version of one of his most popular Christmas sermons.

The starting point for his book is the conviction that:

'Every year our increasingly secular society becomes more unaware of its historical roots, many of which are the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Yet once a year at Christmas these basic truths become a bit more accessible to an enormous audience. At countless gatherings, concerts, parties and other events, even when most participants are nonreligious the essentials of the faith can sometimes become clear. As an example, let's ask some questions of the famous Christmas carol 'Hark! The Herald Angels Sing,' heard in malls, in grocery stores and on street corners. *Who is Jesus?* He is 'Everlasting Lord' who from 'highest heaven' comes down to be 'offspring of the virgin's womb.' *What did he come to do?* His mission is to see 'God and sinners reconciled.' *How did he accomplish it?* He 'lays his glory by' that we 'may no more may die.' *How can this life be ours?* Through an inward spiritual regeneration so radical that, as we have seen, it can be called 'the second birth.' With brilliant economy of style, the carol gives us a summary of the entire Christian teaching.'

In his view:

'While few of the most familiar Christmas songs and Bible readings are that comprehensive, it remains that one season of the year hundreds of millions of people, if they would take the trouble to ask these kinds of questions, would have this same knowledge available to them. To understand Christmas is to understand basic Christianity, the Gospel.'

In the light of this conviction about the significance of Christmas, the purpose of his book, he says, is:

'...to make the truths of Christmas less hidden. We will look at some passages of the Bible that are famous because they are dusted off every Christmas, at the one moment of the year when our secular society and the Christian Church are, to some degree, thinking about the same thing. In the first chapters of the book, looking at the Gospel of Matthew, we will look at the gift God gives us at Christmas. In the following chapters, focusing on the Gospel of Luke, we will consider how we can welcome and receive these gifts.'

If you are looking for a scholarly commentary on the birth narratives in Matthew or Luke, or a verse by verse exposition of them, then this is not the book for you. However, if you want a clear and readable account of the gifts a gracious God gives us through the birth of Christ and how we can receive them for ourselves then you will find this book immensely helpful. As in all his books, what Keller gives us here is readable biblical theology and what he writes will be a very useful resource for anyone called to preach or teach about the Christmas story. In addition, this would also be a good book to give to a serious enquirer who wants to know why Christmas is important from a Christian perspective.

Commendation:

The *Presbyterian Herald* reviewer comments:

'The reading of this book led me to a deeper appreciation of the grace given to me. For the non-Christian reader this book may well be transformational. I believe this would be an excellent book to give to those who are seeking... Keller displays a great gift in being able to take complex theological subject and explain them with clarity and simplicity, making the message accessible to everyone.'

Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Sceptical*, Hodder and Stoughton, ISBN 978-1-44475-019-5, £16.99 (e edition also available).

Martin's Opinion:

If we ask who this book is for then Keller himself provides a very clear answer. He writes: 'If you think that Christianity doesn't hold much promise of making sense to a thinking person, then this book is for you. If you have friends or family who feel this way (and who in our society doesn't) this book should be full of interest for you and them as well.' This is an excellent, readable, primer in basic Christian apologetics that people need to buy, ponder, use, lend and give away. An invaluable resource.

Overview:

Timothy Keller's new book *Making Sense of God* is a follow up to his award winning 2008 volume *The Reason for God*. As Keller explains, he now feels that the argument in *The Reason for God* did not start far enough back.

'Some years ago I wrote a book called *The Reason for God* which, as the title suggests, provides a case, a set of reasons, for belief in God and Christianity. While that book has been helpful to many, it does not begin far enough back for many people. Some will not even begin the journey of exploration, because, frankly, Christianity does not seem relevant enough to be worth their while. 'Doesn't religion calls for leaps of faith in an age of science, reason and technology?' they will ask. 'Surely fewer and fewer people will feel the need for religion and it will die out?'

Making Sense of God engages with these objections. It is divided into two parts.

In chapters 1-2 Keller challenges: 'both the assumption that the world is getting more secular and the belief that secular nonreligious people are basing their view of life mainly on reason.' 'The reality is,' he says, 'that every person embraces his or her worldview for a variety of rational, emotional, cultural and social factors.'

In chapters 3-12 he compares and contrasts the ways in which:

'...Christianity and secularism (with occasional references to other religions) seek to provide meaning, satisfaction, freedom, identity, a moral compass, and hope – all things so crucial that we cannot live without them. I will be arguing that Christianity makes the most emotional and cultural sense, that it explain life issues in the most trenchant ways, and that it gives us unequalled resources for meeting these inescapable human needs.'

During the course of *Making Sense of God* Keller also tackles many of 'background beliefs that our culture presses on us about Christianity, which make it seem so implausible.' Among these beliefs are:

- 'You don't need to believe in God to live a life full of meaning, hope and satisfaction;'
- 'You should be free to live as you see fit as long as you don't harm others;'
- 'You become yourself when you are true to your deepest desires and dreams;'
- 'You don't need to believe in God to have a basis for moral values and human rights;'
- There's little or no evidence for the existence of God or the truth of Christianity.'

If we ask who this book is for then Keller himself provides a very clear answer. He writes: 'If you think that Christianity doesn't hold much promise of making sense to a thinking person, then this book is for you. If you have friends or family who feel this way (and who in our society doesn't) this book should be full of interest for you and them as well.' This is an excellent, readable, primer in basic Christian apologetics that people need to buy, ponder, use, lend and give away. An invaluable resource.

Commendation:

Together Magazine says:

'This new book from Tim Keller is the follow-up to the hugely successful *The Reason for God* and particularly addresses those that believe that Christianity lacks any cultural relevance. He tackles their objections, compares Christianity to secularism, and addresses many 'mis-beliefs' that have arisen over what Christianity is, or what Christians believe.'

Peter Mead. *Lost in Wonder: A Biblical Introduction to God's Great Marriage*, Christian Focus, ISBN 978-1-78191-907-1, £8.99 (e edition also available).

Martin's Opinion:

This book can be highly recommended to anyone who wants to understand how the theme of marital union runs central to the whole of Scripture. One writer has said the whole message of the Bible can be summed up in five words from God 'I want to marry you' and Mead shows us why this is true. This book is easily to read and would make an excellent basis for a sermon series or a series of home group sessions.

Overview:

In his 1520 tract *The Freedom of a Christian*, Martin Luther explains the benefits of saving faith in terms of a marital union between Christ and the Christian. Following Luther, Peter Mead, who is director of the Chippenham based mentored ministry training programme Cor Deo, also bases his new book on biblical theology, *Lost in Wonder*, on the idea of the marriage between God and Man.

Mead's starting point is the observation:

'The Bible makes marriage its pre-eminent image for our relationship with Christ, but too easily we seems to turn that into a celebration of a legal status change while missing out on the greatest privilege of all – being one with Christ. For many in our churches today, a Christian life has diminished into a merely legal; status of salvation – that by faith in Christ we have a new status before God. When we chase through the Bible and see how rich the material there is, I can't help but wonder why we have been so captured by a reduced gospel.'

Christianity, he writes, does not just offer us a change of status.

'It is not simply that we were sinners who now have been legally justified in God's eternal records. Nor are we offered a relationship with Christ that is somehow *like* a marriage. Rather, Christianity offers us the wonder of being one with Christ, of being married. That includes and requires some legal realities, particularly justification. These legal realities are, indeed, very important. However, being one with Christ also includes relational realities, communication, companionship and relational intimacy, all in the context of a true spiritual union. When we dare to scratch at the surface of Christianity with our noses in our Bibles, we discover the most astonishing reality that will thrill our souls for the whole of eternity – we are invited to be one with Christ.'

According to Mead 'whole story of God's plan from eternity to eternity can be told via three 'unions.'" These are the union of Father Son and Holy Spirit in the Trinity, the union of God and Man in the incarnation and the union between Christ and the Church. His book is divided into four parts which cover these three unions.

Part one begins with 'the beautiful union of God the Trinity' and then moves on to the mess caused by sin. 'As we progress through the books of Moses we discover the distance between God and man, the way we as humans fall short of God's marital ideal.

Part two, which covers the rest of the Old Testament looks at 'the tragic confusion we creatures like to create for ourselves,' but also 'the growing hope of a great marriage that flows from an ever faithful God.'

Part three, considers Christ as the groom.' We will watch the miracle of His arrival, listen to His perspective on marriage, see Him wooing His bride, and watch Him make the proposal. In Jesus, God comes to humanity, so that humanity might be brought to God...the wonder of the Christian message!'

Finally part four examines the union between Christ and the Church, a reality which 'absolutely astounded the apostles' as we see 'when we listen to Jesus' half-brother, watch persecutor Paul marvel over our union with the Messiah, and finish with the beloved disciple as he anticipates the fulfilment of all God's plans.'

This book can be highly recommended to anyone who wants to understand how the theme of marital union runs central to the whole of Scripture. One writer has said the whole message of the Bible can be summed up in five words from God 'I want to marry you' and Mead shows us why this is true, why union with Christ is central to what the Bible has to say about the relationship between God and humanity. This book is easily to read and would make an excellent basis for a sermon series or a series of home group sessions.

Commendation:

Glen Scrivener has written: 'There are many Bible overviews that trace God's plans through Scripture. *Lost In Wonder* explores God's passion, his proposal. Read this book to grasp not only the heart of the Scriptures but the heart of God.'