



Latimer Trust Monthly Reading List - February 2017

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
Andrew T Abernethy	<i>The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom: A Thematic-Theological Approach</i>	This book is a helpful way in to understanding the overall message of the book of Isaiah. With help of the teaching series outline in the appendix it provides the basis for a sermon series on Isaiah or for the study of Isaiah in a home group context.
Ryan Nicholas Danker	<i>Wesley and the Anglicans: Political Division in Early Evangelicalism</i>	Danker has undoubtedly highlighted a neglected political dimension to the divisions within eighteenth century English evangelicalism and by so doing has provided us with a more detailed and nuanced account of these divisions. Anyone who wants to understand the history of eighteenth century Evangelicalism better should therefore read this book.
Philip Giddings, Martin Down, Elaine Sugden and Gareth Tuckwell	<i>Talking About Dying: Help in Facing Death & Dying</i>	This is a comprehensive and practical guide to death and dying. It is written by Christians and from a Christian perspective, but it is a book that will found helpful by those of all faiths and none. This is an immensely helpful resource as part of the process of breaking the silence about death which the authors of this book call for.
Glynn Harrison	<i>A Better Story, God, Sex and Human Flourishing</i>	This book is a hugely valuable resource for Christians who want to understand the nature and impact of the sexual revolution and to be stimulated to think how to respond to it in a way that is both biblically faithful and culturally relevant.
Robert Kolb	<i>Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God: The Wittenberg School and Its Scripture-Centered Proclamation</i>	This is not a book to give to students starting their study of the Reformation. It is very much a study written by a specialist for others who already have some knowledge of, or interest in, its subject matter. However, for anyone who falls into this category it can be highly recommended.
Tom McLeish and David Hutchings	<i>Let There be Science: Why God loves science, and science needs God</i>	This book is an excellent popular introduction to the relationship between Christianity and science. It would make great resource for home group discussion and for those engaged in the 'can you believe in God and science?' debate as part of Christian apologetics.
Timothy Shah and Alan D Hertzke Alan D Hertzke and Timothy Shah	<i>Christianity and Freedom: Volume 1: Historical Perspectives (Law and Christianity)</i> <i>Christianity and Freedom: Volume 2: Contemporary Perspectives (Law and Christianity)</i>	These volumes, which are written by experts in the disciplines of history, political science and sociology will become standard reference works for historians, political scientists, theologians, students, journalists, business leaders, opinion shapers, and policymakers. They demonstrate clearly that both over the course of history, and still today, Christianity and freedom go together.
John Stott	<i>Basic Introduction to the New Testament</i>	Some books are classics that have stood the test of time and this is one of them. What it says still provides a readable and reliable starting point for those beginning their study of the New Testament or for those who want a quick overview to provide them with a wider context for studying or preaching on a particular passage from the New Testament.
Gillian Straine	<i>Cancer: A Pilgrim Companion</i>	This book offers a valuable new Christian approach to making spiritual sense of suffering from cancer and undergoing treatment for it. It will be a very helpful resource both for those who have cancer and for those supporting them, whether family, friends or members of the medical profession.

Andrew T Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom: A Thematic-Theological Approach*, Inter-Varsity Press, ISBN 978-1-78359-428-3, £14.99 (e edition also available).

Martin's opinion:

This book is a helpful way in to understanding the overall message of the book of Isaiah. It does not represent the only possible way to understand Isaiah's message (nor would it claim to), but it does offer a way of understanding it that makes sense of Isaiah's prophecy as a word from God not only to its original audience, but also to God's people today. It will of great assistance to students beginning their study of Isaiah and to those called to preach and teach Isaiah's message today. In addition, with help of the teaching series outline in the appendix it provides the basis for a sermon series on Isaiah or for the study of Isaiah in a home group context.

Overview:

Andrew T. Abernethy is Assistant Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College, Illinois. His new study of the message of Isaiah in the New Studies in Biblical Theology series starts from the observation that while the book of Isaiah 'has nourished the church through the centuries,' nevertheless:

'... its massive size can be intimidating; its historical setting can seem distant, opaque, varied; its organization and composition can seem disjointed and fragmented; its abundance of terse, poetic language can make its message seem veiled - and where are those explicit prophecies about Christ? These are typical experiences for many who try to read, let alone teach or preach, through Isaiah.'

In Abernethy's view, in the face of these problems 'thematic points of reference can be of great help in encountering Isaiah and its rich theological message.'

The theme which he chooses as his starting point for understanding Isaiah is the concept of God's kingdom and the purpose of his book is 'to offer an integrated vision of the message of Isaiah through the concept of kingdom.' His contention is that 'Isaiah provides a people living amidst imperial contexts with a theological interpretation of them in the light of YHWH's past, present and future sovereign reign.'

Abernethy's study focusses on four aspects of what Isaiah has to say about the concept of God's kingdom: '(1) God, the King, (2) the lead agents of the King, (3) the realm of the kingdom, and (4) the people of the King.

In chapter one he looks at 'God the King now and to come' in Isaiah 1-39. In chapter two he looks at 'God the only saving king' in Isaiah 40-55. In chapter three he looks at 'God, the warrior, international and compassionate king' in Isaiah 56-66. In chapter four he looks at 'the lead agents of the king' I terms of 'the Davidic ruler' in Isaiah 1-39, 'the servant of the Lord' in Isaiah 40-55 and 'God's messenger' in Isaiah 56-66. Finally in chapter five he looks at 'the realm and the people of God's kingdom.'

Abernethy's primary aim is to show how 'kingdom' is fundamental to Isaiah when understood within its immediate Old Testament context. However, he also includes 'canonical reflections' to assist those who are wrestling with how to read Isaiah as Christian Scripture in and for the Church. In addition, there is an appendix which contains an outline for a teaching series on Isaiah.

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Commendations:

Don Carson writes:

'In a well-written and remarkably comprehensive treatment, Dr. Andrew Abernethy takes us through the book by unfolding the way God and his kingdom are presented in each of the three major sections of the prophecy, and then by outlining the way this reigning God uses agents to accomplish his purpose. Dr. Abernethy undertakes all of this exegetical and theological exploration with an eye peeled for the way New Testament writers, seven centuries later, pick up on these trajectories to bring us to Christ.'

Ryan Nicholas Danker, *Wesley and the Anglicans: Political Division in Early Evangelicalism*, Inter-Varsity Press US, ISBN 9780830851225, £21.38 (e edition also available)

Martin's opinion:

There will be those who will continue to give more weight to the theological divisions over Arminianism and Calvinism than he does. However, he has undoubtedly highlighted a neglected political dimension to the divisions within eighteenth century English evangelicalism and by so doing has provided us with a more detailed and nuanced account of these divisions than earlier explanations of them have provided. Anyone who wants to understand the history of eighteenth century Evangelicalism better should therefore read this book.

Overview:

Ryan Danker is the Assistant Professor of Church History and Methodist Studies at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. In his new book he undertakes a fresh exploration of the cause of the division that took place in the eighteenth century between John Wesley and those associated with him and other evangelical clergy in the Church of England.

As he explains in his introduction, his view is that 'John Wesley's relationship with evangelical clergymen of the eighteenth-century is a historical topic that has been too little studied in its fuller context.' Consequently, his study 'is an attempt to understand that relationship and the gradual divide that took place between Wesley and fellow evangelicals in the Church of England.'

He notes that the accepted view of this divide has been that 'Wesley's Arminianism clashed with the dominant Calvinism of eighteenth-century evangelical Anglicans and caused a rift in the Evangelical Revival in England.' His book is an attempt to present a 'counterargument' to this view which will give:

'...a more coherent description of the larger picture and of the events and issues that led some evangelical clergy to disassociate with Wesley and Wesleyan Methodism. My approach in this book is that social, political and ecclesiastical issues have not been given proper weight in the discussion. When considered in isolation, the theological questions raised by the participants in this slow divide simply do not provide the necessary rationale for a division of English evangelicalism.'

In particular, Danker argues that an important factor in the division was political issues going back to the English Civil War of the seventeenth century:

'Methodism often raised suspicion of rebellion much akin to the Cromwellian revolution that overthrew Church and Crown in the previous century. Methodists, particularly those connected to Wesley, were thought to be setting up 'conventicles' throughout England that would undermine the regular clergy and perhaps the Crown.'

As Danker sees it, the concerns of other evangelicals about Methodist intrusion into parishes, the setting up of Methodist societies and the administration of the sacraments by Methodist lay preachers need to be seen in this context. Evangelical clergy needed to distance themselves from such Methodist irregularities in order to establish their loyalty to the established Church and by extension to the Crown.

Not all Church historians will agree with Danker's thesis. There will be those who will continue to give more weight to the theological divisions over Arminianism and Calvinism than he does. However, he has undoubtedly highlighted a neglected political dimension to the divisions within eighteenth century English evangelicalism and by so doing has provided us with a more detailed and nuanced account of these divisions than earlier explanations of them have provided. Anyone who wants to understand the history of eighteenth century Evangelicalism better should therefore read this book.

Commendation:

Kenneth Collins has written:

'Challenging the 'standard line' that Wesley's relationship with those evangelicals who remained in the Church of England during the eighteenth century was one despoiled largely by theological considerations, that is, his Arminianism and their Calvinism, Danker has carefully weaved social, political and ecclesiastical threads to offer a far more sophisticated and ultimately convincing picture. This is a splendid book on so many levels: creatively conceived, deftly contextualized and wonderfully executed. I highly recommend it.'

Philip Giddings, Martin Down, Elaine Sugden and Gareth Tuckwell, *Talking About Dying: Help in Facing Death & Dying*, Wilberforce Publications, ISBN 978-0-99568-320-4, £8.00 (e edition also available).

Martin's opinion:

This is a comprehensive and practical guide to death and dying. It is written by Christians and from a Christian perspective, but it is a book that will found helpful by those of all faiths and none. This is an immensely helpful resource which Christians need to read for themselves and then pass on to their families and friends as part of the process of breaking the silence about death which the authors of this book call for.

Overview:

The purpose of this new book from Wilberforce Publications is to encourage people to talk about the subjects of death and dying, subjects that are all too often passed over in silence. As the authors declare, they believe such silence needs to end:

‘This book has been written from our shared conviction that silence will not do. We need to talk about dying and death. We need to do that because it is an unavoidable part of human life: death comes to us all; we can try to avoid it, but sooner or later it comes.’

They go on to say that we also need to talk about dying and death:

‘...because talking about it will often be helpful to the dying person and their relatives and friends. This is especially so if, as is often the case, talking leads to action on our own part or on the part of others.’

Their call to their readers is therefore ‘let death no longer be the great unmentionable, but something we talk about honestly and constructively.’

The topics covered in the book include:

- The different ways in which people respond to life threatening illness;
- Talking to doctors and other medical practitioners;
- The when, where and how of death;
- Sudden death;
- Suicide;
- Still birth;
- Terminal illness in children;
- Secular and perceptions of death and the Christian hope of the life to come;
- Facing up to the fear of death;
- Finding mental and spiritual healing in the face of death;
- Practical questions about preparing for death and handling it when it happens.

As this list of topics indicates, this is a comprehensive and practical guide to death and dying. It is written by Christians and from a Christian perspective, but it is a book that will found helpful by those of all faiths and none. This is an immensely helpful resource which Christians need to read for themselves and then pass on to their families and friends as part of the process of breaking the silence about death which the authors of this book call for.

Commendations:

Michael Lloyd has written:

‘About a third of Wesley’s sermons were on dying well - I don’t think I have ever heard a sermon on that subject, as the Church has tacitly colluded with our culture’s discomfort with the subject. This deeply practical and pastoral book will go a long way to rectifying that silence and reducing that discomfort. It would be a hugely helpful resource for every pastor and ordinand.’

Glynn Harrison, *A Better Story, God, Sex and Human Flourishing*, Inter-Varsity Press, ISBN 978-1-78359-446-7, £9.99 (e edition also available).

Martin's opinion:

This book is a hugely valuable resource for Christians who want to understand the nature and impact of the sexual revolution and to be stimulated to think how to respond to it in a way that is both biblically faithful and culturally relevant.

Overview:

Glynn Harrison was formerly Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Bristol, where he was also a practising consultant psychiatrist. He is a lay member of the Church of England and speaks widely on issues of faith and psychology, mental health and neuroscience.

The starting point for his new book is the observation is that our society has undergone a moral revolution in relation to issues of sexuality. The result of this revolution is that:

‘Christians whose views once occupied the mainstream of public morality suddenly feel weird. It’s worse than that: they feel guilty. Guilty for holding views held to be degrading to the human spirit. Guilty that they belong to a faith accused of heartlessly pushing the most vulnerable and marginalized out into the cold. Guilty for having apparently heaped abuse on those whose only crime was being different.’

In the face of this ‘paradigm shift’ Harrison’s aim in his book is twofold. (a) To explain how this change came about and (b) to show ‘in the face of the challenges posed by the sexual revolution, that the Bible’s teaching is still good news.’

The book is in three parts.

In the first part Harrison argues that Christians are failing to respond adequately to the sexual revolution for three reasons. First, ‘We haven’t grasped the ideological coherence of the revolution or mounted an effective intellectual engagement.’ Secondly, ‘we have failed to grasp that the revolution has a positive moral vision of its own...an inspirational vision of compassion and equality.’ Thirdly, we have failed to ‘grasp the central role that narrative played in helping secure the revolution’s cultural dominance.’ ‘We need,’ he says, ‘to learn how narrative structures and formulas can be used to make a point of view appear more compelling and plausible. And then we must ask if we have a story of our own to tell? And, if so, what is it?’

In the second part he moves on to look at how ‘thoughtful biblically minded Christians should react to these challenges and mount a more effective critique.’ As he sees it:

‘Too often our incursions into public debate have sounded over-defensive, judgemental and out of touch. We answer questions that no one is asking. How can we begin a critical engagement with the fallout of the revolution in a way that wins hearts and minds, and not just arguments?’

In the third part he argues that ‘it is time for Christians to regain our confidence, time to offer a better story of our own.’ He outlines this story as follows:

- ‘The Christian vision for sex and relationships is grounded in the foundational truth that human beings are creatures made in the image of God. Our identity is defined by this reality. It isn’t something that we have to discover within ourselves or constructed for ourselves – our Creator revealed it to us.
- Although sin has disfigured and distorted the image of God in human beings, Christ’s death and resurrection have made possible its full restoration. As we trust in him, and live and work towards the final restoration of all things in him, the process of renovation is already well under way.
- Living out our God-given identity as divine image-bearers puts us on the road to a flourishing that involves fruitful creative endeavour and a transformation of our relationships – including our sexual relationships. ‘
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- Living out our God-given identity as divine image-bearers puts us on the road to a flourishing that involves fruitful creative endeavour and a transformation of our relationships - including our sexual relationships.....

- As divine image-bearers, we are called to love in the same way that God loves. Because God's intimate love for us is bound up with faithfulness and fruitfulness that is how we express our most intimate level of love for each other as well - in a relationship of faithfulness and fruitfulness called marriage. This form of bodily expression of our sexuality also puts the story of God's love on display for the world.
- Marriage is a gift from God - a sacred covenant between one man and one woman that paints a vivid picture of Christ's love for his church. Both the married (by their faithfulness) and the unmarried (by their chastity) play their different roles in upholding the biblical concept of marriage as the only God-given context for intimate sexual love.
- For Christians true human flourishing isn't found in the pursuit of self-fulfilment, but in living in harmony with out true identity. It involves playing our part in the bigger story of the break-in of God's rule; we flourish when we look outwards, serving others and working for a good greater than ourselves.
- Two God given institutions - the family and the local church - play a central role in nourishing this big inclusive vision of human flourishing, and strong marriages have an integral part in both. These relational networks provide mutual support, help build and develop character and ensure stable and protective environments for children.
- All Christians, regardless of age marital state gender or sexuality, by living faithfully in harmony with their identity in Christ, are called to play their part in supporting these two life-giving institutions. The biblical vision for sex is a holistic one in which everybody lives sacrificially for the common good.¹

This book is a hugely valuable resource for Christians who want to understand the nature and impact of the sexual revolution and to be stimulated to think how to respond to it in a way that is both biblically faithful and culturally relevant. Handling the sexual revolution properly is one of the biggest challenges facing the Church in this country at the moment and Harrison's book enables us to meet this challenge better. This is a book to buy, to read, to ponder, to lend and to give away.

Commendations:

Julian Hardyman comments:

'A really first-class piece of work on a most important topic. The style is warm, persuasive and engaging. The content is clear, incisive and wise. We really need this book! Glynn Harrison has served the church and wider society very, very significantly by writing it.'

Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God: The Wittenberg School and Its Scripture-Centered Proclamation*, Baker Academic, ISBN 978-0-8010486-3-0, £40.69 (e edition also available).

Martin's opinion:

This is not a book to give to students starting their study of the Reformation. It is very much a study written by a specialist for others who already have some knowledge of, or interest in, its subject matter. However, for anyone who falls into this category it can be highly recommended.

Overview:

Robert Kolb is a Lutheran theologian who is Emeritus Professor of Systematic Theology at Concordia Seminary, St Louis Missouri. His new book explores how Martin Luther's approach to the Bible led his colleagues and contemporary followers into an approach to theology and pastoral leadership based on the study and proclamation of Scripture.

In Kolb's words:

'This book seeks to analyse how Luther's new definition of being Christian changed theological education and parish life, and how Luther with his colleagues and students all pursued the task of serving as God's instruments in his conversation with sinners, unrepentant and repentant.'

According to Kolb, Luther's redefinition of the life of faith in terms of a response to the God who speaks to us through the Bible led to a transformation of theological education.

First of all, it meant that

'...the pastorate demanded more than learning the rules for ritual and proper administration of the parish. Being a pastor, exercising the office of preacher, demanded skill at teaching the Word of God from the text of Scripture and translating the ancient words of the text into effective pastoral care for both rebellious spirits and troubled, fearful hearts.'

This in turn meant that those who taught pastors theology, such as Luther himself, Philip Melancthon and others

'...had to prepare students to mediate God's conversation with their congregations and cultivate their proper responses in word and deed, in prayer and praise to God, and in daily service in love to the neighbor. Congregational life continued to find a certain center in the church building, but that sacred space no longer served as a ladder to heaven but rather as the 'mouth house,' which shaped the entire conversation between God and his chosen people, as it continued on a daily basis in their entire lives.'

As a result

'...in the reconstruction of the Wittenberg theological curriculum that took place informally from 1518 onward and formally from 1533, the Bible constituted the subject matter to be learned. The faculty colleagues divided the lectures, each focusing on one Testament or the other, though not in any restrictive way.'

Kolb's book looks in detail at both the roots and the results of this focus on the study of the Bible at Wittenberg in the lifetimes of Luther and Melancthon.

It starts by examining how Luther understood the Bible as God's word and then goes on to look at how Luther interpreted and lectured on the Bible and how he passed on the biblical message through his preaching and his translation of the Bible into German.

It next goes on to examine how the Bible was understood and taught by other Wittenberg theologians influenced by Luther such as Melancthon, Justus Jonas, Johannes Bugenhagen and Kaspar Cruciger, and by the circle of students around them. Kolb contends that the influence of Luther and his colleagues resulted in the creation of

'...a Wittenberg school of exegesis that extended over two generations. The exegesis and the preaching of these students of the Wittenberg team reveal that their university instruction had not only shaped their understanding of Scripture and their practice of conveying it to their students and congregations but also unleashed a dynamic that continued what those who sparked the Wittenberg Reformation intended for the church.'

This is not a book to give to students starting their study of the Reformation. It is very much a study written by a specialist for others who already have some knowledge of, or interest in, its subject matter. However, for anyone who falls into this category it can be highly recommended. It shows in detail how the commitment of Luther and his colleagues to the centrality of Scripture as the means by which we know God and his will led to a re-shaping of the theological curriculum and subsequently a reshaping of the Church as a result. The take away message is that a few individuals who take the Bible seriously can actually change history. If this could happen in Luther's day then why not in ours?

Commendation:

Carl Trueman has written: 'While Luther rightly dominates Lutheranism as the single most important theological leader of the movement, he neither emerged from a vacuum nor operated as a Reformer in isolation. Instead, he was part of the vibrant intellectual ferment of his time, particularly as that was instantiated in the University of Wittenberg. Drawing on a lifetime of study not only of Luther himself but also of the Wittenberg School of which Luther was a part, Robert Kolb here offers a superb contextual analysis of Luther's biblical exegesis and theology both in his own day and as they were subsequently developed by his students. For those interested in the history of exegesis, the thought of Martin Luther, and the formation of post-Luther Lutheranism, this book is a treat.'

Tom McLeish and David Hutchings, *Let There be Science: Why God loves science, and science needs God*, Lion Hudson, ISBN 978-0-74596-863-6, £10.99 (e edition also available).

Martin's opinion:

This book is an excellent popular introduction to the relationship between Christianity and science which will be of interest to anyone who knows that the two are often seen to be opposed, but suspects there is more to be said. It would make great resource for home group discussion and for those engaged in the 'can you believe in God and science?' debate as part of Christian apologetics. The scientific credentials of its authors ensure that the science is accurate, but they have written the book in a way that makes it easy for non-scientist to understand. Highly recommended.

Overview:

Tom McLeish is Professor of Physics at Durham University and chairs the Royal Society's education committee. David Hutchings teaches Physics at Pocklington School in York and also trains teachers with the Yorkshire branch of the Institute of Physics.

Their book starts with the observation that Hutchings' pupils are surprised to discover that as a science teacher he believes in God. They think 'that you have to pick a side – God or science.' The reason for this, Hutchings suggests, is because 'someone, somewhere, has been doing the media-based equivalent of shouting aggressively at whoever happens to be nearby – and that my students, like everyone else, have picked up the echoes and settled for that.'

By contrast, their book is:

'...about what we might be able to hear underneath all of the shouting. It is a book about what Christianity says about science, and what science says about Christianity – all through stories of interest to readers of all faiths or none. It seeks to pick up on what has, all too often, been drowned out by the noise: that science flows naturally from the Christian worldview and always has.'

The overall argument they put forward is that it is unfortunate that the relationship between Christianity and science:

'...has been almost completely lost in inaccurate or over-emphasised tales of prejudices, mistakes and terrible deeds that have sometimes arisen in the name of either faith or science. For every disaster, there are a multitude of success stories, nearly all of which never seem to be told.

It is time, now, for this to be remedied. The Bible's message speaks of a God who loves science and of a science that needs God. Again and again, this has been proved to be true in the real world of physics and chemistry and biology. This is a book about those instances and the wonderful message that is threaded through each of them: that science is a gift from God, one with unlimited potential for good, and we are all to treasure it, whether experts or not.'

Some of the stories which they tell are very modern, such as those relating to the treatment of brain cancer and the development of the Polaroid camera, whereas others such as the biblical stories of Asaph, Job and St. Paul are very ancient. What they all have in common is the message that science and belief are complementary rather than opposed. The book also contains numerous quotes from an array of eminent scientists such as Niels Bohr, Albert Einstein, Michael Faraday, Clerk Maxwell and Erwin Schrodinger, all of which underline the same truth.

This book is an excellent popular introduction to the relationship between Christianity and science which will be of interest to anyone who knows that the two are often seen to be opposed, but suspects there is more to be said. It would make great resource for home group discussion and for those engaged in the 'can you believe in God and science?' debate as part of Christian apologetics. The scientific credentials of its authors ensure that the science is accurate, but they have written the book in a way that makes it easy for non-scientist to understand. Highly recommended.

Commendation:

Andy Bannister has written:

'A fascinating and highly original contribution to the God and science discussion. David and Tom show that rather than science and Christianity being at war with each other, there's a powerful fit between science and faith. Far from Christianity only being for Dawkins' 'died in the wool faith heads', *Let There Be Science* lays out a myriad ways that Christianity offers rich resources for science including the most powerful motive for doing science in the first place.'

Timothy Shah and Alan D Hertzke, *Christianity and Freedom: Volume 1: Historical Perspectives (Law and Christianity)*, CUP, ISBN 978-1-10756-183-0, £ 29.99, (h/b & e editions also available).

Alan D Hertzke and Timothy Shah, *Christianity and Freedom: Volume 2: Contemporary Perspectives (Law and Christianity)*, CUP, ISBN 978-1-10756-188-5, (h/b and e editions also available).

Martin's opinion:

These volumes, which are written by experts in the disciplines of history, political science and sociology will become standard reference works for historians, political scientists, theologians, students, journalists, business leaders, opinion shapers, and policymakers. They demonstrate clearly that both over the course of history, and still today, Christianity and freedom go together. The secular world constantly tells us explicitly or implicitly that to be free you have to reject the Christian faith and expunge it from public life. These volumes demonstrate that the opposite is true. It is Christianity that sets people free, not only spiritually but politically and socially as well.

Overview:

These two volumes are the fruit of a cooperative research project 'initiated, supported and conceived' by the Religious Freedom Research Project of the Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs at Georgetown University in the United States.

In the first volume a series of leading historians including Elizabeth Digeser, John Rist and Robert Wilken uncover the often unappreciated role of Christianity in the development of basic human rights and freedoms from antiquity through today. These, they argue, include radical notions of dignity and equality, religious freedom, liberty of conscience, limited government, the need for consent of the governed, economic liberty, autonomous civil society, and church-state separation, as well as more recent advances in democracy, human rights, and human development. While they acknowledge that the historical record of Christianity is mixed, they demonstrate that the seeds of freedom in Christianity antedate and ultimately undermine later Christian justifications and practices of persecution.

In the words of the Introduction:

'...the many diverse contributors to this volume suggest that mainstream historic Christianity has frequently generated powerful ideas and practices of social and political freedom. Furthermore, in many of these cases, it is precisely some of the central, dogmatic affirmations of Christianity that have encouraged and inspired innovative notions and practices of freedom. In other words it is not only exceptional or marginal, or in spite of itself that Christianity has proved politically liberating. With remarkable frequency and in important cases, fresh notions and institutions of political and religious freedom have flowed directly from mainstream Christianity, whether in its Catholic, Orthodox or Reformed expressions.'

The second volume explains how Christian minorities and transnational Christian networks contribute to the freedom and flourishing of societies across the globe, even amidst pressure and violent persecution.

It features unprecedented field research by some of the world's most distinguished scholars, including Paul Marshall, Rebecca Shah and Mariz Tadros, and documents the role that Christians play around the world in promoting human rights and religious freedom, fighting injustice, stimulating economic equality, providing education, social services, and health care and nurturing democratic civil society.

The overall conclusion of the volume is that:

'...the advance and maintenance of freedom around the globe are tied to the fate of Christianity. Careful field research demonstrates the outsized role of Christian communities in defending religious freedom and human rights, empowering the marginalized, and providing education, health care and social services. Pledging fealty to an authority higher than the state, Christians strive to carve spaces for autonomous civil society and conscience rights that underpin democratic governance. Moreover, wide-ranging indigenous initiatives are vitally linked to global Christian humanitarian networks and human rights advocacy, magnifying policy impact.'

These volumes, which are written by experts in the disciplines of history, political science and sociology will become standard reference works for historians, political scientists, theologians, students, journalists, business leaders, opinion shapers, and policymakers. They demonstrate clearly that both over the course of history, and still today, Christianity and freedom go together. The secular world constantly tells us explicitly or implicitly that to be free you have to reject the Christian faith and expunge it from public life. These volumes demonstrate that the opposite is true. It is Christianity that sets people free, not only spiritually but politically and socially as well.

John Stott, *Basic Introduction to the New Testament*, Eerdmans, ISBN 978-0-80287-469-6, £12.99.

Martin's opinion:

There are obviously a very large number of New Testament introductions on the market and the study of the New Testament has moved on since 1994, but some books are classics that have stood the test of time and this book is one of them. What it says still provides a readable and reliable starting point for those beginning their study of the New Testament or for those who want a quick overview to provide them with a wider context for studying or preaching on a particular passage from the New Testament.

Overview:

This Book from Eerdmans is a reprint of the 1994 edition of John Stott's introductory guide to the writers and writings of the New Testament. The guide was first published in 1952 under the title *Men with a Message* and was then revised by Stott himself in 1964. In 1994 a new edition was produced by the Evangelical New Testament scholar Steve Motyer at Stott's invitation which expanded and updated Stott's material.

As one reviewer has said, the great strength of this book is that it enables its readers to see the wood for the trees. That is to say, it does not get bogged down in unnecessary technicalities or details, but gives an overview of the overall message of the New Testament writers and their books.

The book is in nine chapters which look in turn at the 'man' and the 'message' of Mark, Matthew, Luke-Acts, John and the Johannine letters, Paul, Hebrews, James, Peter and Revelation. Motyer's 1994 revision retains Stott's concise style, apt phrasing and overall perspective, while occasionally adding additional details on the basis of more recent study.

There are obviously a very large number of New Testament introductions on the market and the study of the New Testament has moved on since 1994, but some books are classics that have stood the test of time and this book is one of them. What it says still provides a readable and reliable starting point for those beginning their study of the New Testament or for those who want a quick overview to provide them with a wider context for studying or preaching on a particular passage from the New Testament. One of the great weaknesses of the Church of England at the moment is that people simply do not understand the biblical material. This is a book which, if widely read, could help to rectify the problem.

Commendation:

Don Carson declares:

'If I were returning to pastoral ministry in a local church, I would ensure that there were always copies available of John Stott's *Basic Introduction to the New Testament*. And every time I started a series of expositions of any New Testament book, Stott's *Basic Introduction* would be mentioned from the pulpit. Christians looking for introductory help in understanding the Bible simply cannot do better than to turn to this classic.'

Gillian Straine, *Cancer: A Pilgrim Companion*, SPCK, ISBN 978-0-28107-502-7, £9.99.

Martin's opinion:

This book offers a valuable new Christian approach to making spiritual sense of suffering from cancer and undergoing treatment for it. It encourages people not just to ask God for deliverance from cancer, but to find him journeying with them as they live with cancer. It will be a very helpful resource both for those who have cancer and for those supporting them, whether family, friends or members of the medical profession.

Overview:

Currently, someone is diagnosed with cancer in this country roughly once every two minutes. As anyone who has had cancer themselves, or knows someone who has, will tell you, such a diagnosis is a life changing event that leads people into situations of suffering, isolation, uncertainty and fear.

In relation to Christian faith such a diagnosis raises the question 'why has God allowed this to happen?' and can lead people to a whole range of responses ranging from giving up on God altogether to believing that prayer will automatically mean that God will heal them.

The Revd Dr Gillian Straine is a scientist and theologian who is currently Director of the Guild of Health and St Raphael, a Christian ecumenical charity that supports the healing ministry of the Church. As someone who is herself a cancer survivor, she understands at first-hand what is involved when someone undergoes treatment for cancer.

In her new book she puts forward a fresh Christian approach to responding to cancer, proposing that that the journey through illness, pain and anxiety that cancer treatment involves should be understood not simply negatively as something to be endured or delivered from, but positively as a pilgrimage of discovery undertaken with God.

The book reminds its readers that the Christian faith teaches us that we are never abandoned by God and that this is true wherever we are, whether in the doctor's waiting room, receiving surgery or undergoing chemotherapy. It relates the experiences undergone by those suffering from cancer to the journey undertaken by Jesus as he moved from the darkness of the garden of Gethsemane, to the cross and then on to the silent waiting of Holy Saturday and by so doing it invites its readers to find God in their experience of having cancer. In addition, by pointing to the way in which remission and life after treatment offer glimmers of the Christian hope of resurrection it invites its readers to find healing in the their own story of illness.

This book offers a valuable new Christian approach to making spiritual sense of suffering from cancer and undergoing treatment for it. It encourages people not just to ask God for deliverance from cancer, but to find him journeying with them as they live with cancer. It will be a very helpful resource both for those who have cancer and for those supporting them, whether family, friends or members of the medical profession.

Commendation:

Bishop James Newcome has written:

'A valuable and readable book of practical guidance and encouragement for fellow travellers.'