



## Latimer Trust Monthly Reading List - August 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
William J Abraham	<i>Among the Ashes: On Death, Grief, and Hope</i>	This book can be recommended for all those who want to explore the issues raised by their own experience of loss, for ministers who are called to give pastoral care to the bereaved, and to students who want to start to think about what Christianity has to say to those who are grieving.
Sean Doherty	<i>The Only Way is Ethics - Part 2: Life and Death</i>	This book provides an excellent, accessible introduction to the topics that it covers.
Albert Hsu	<i>Grieving a Suicide: A loved one's search for comfort, answers and hope</i>	This book is an invaluable resource for those directly affected by suicide or those who want to understand what grieving a suicide involves. Ministers and others involved in pastoral care should read it and have it to hand and churches should have copies of it to lend or give away.
Timothy R Jennings	<i>The God-shaped brain</i>	This is a fascinating book that draws together the insights of Christian theology and neuroscience in a new and creative way
Tim Keller	<i>Ministries of Mercy: Learning To Care Like Jesus</i>	It would make an excellent basis for a sermon series and the questions provided at the end of each chapter would make it equally useful for study in a home group. Highly recommended for anyone who wants understand the theological basis for mercy ministry and how to go about it in practice.
Tremper Longman III	<i>The Fear of the Lord Is Wisdom: A Theological Introduction to Wisdom in Israel</i>	This is a thorough and up to date piece of scholarship by a first rate Old Testament scholar. It will be of value to students, ministers and others who want an update on what biblical scholarship has to say about how to understand the wisdom tradition in the Bible as a whole.
Ashley Null, and John W Yates III (eds.)	<i>Reformation Anglicanism</i>	This will be an invaluable resource that will enable students, ministers, and anyone else interested in the future of Anglicanism, to get their bearings by understanding how the Anglican Communion arose out of the Reformation.
Michael Reeves and John Stott	<i>The Reformation: What you need to know and why</i>	If you are an Evangelical and want to know why the Reformation should matter to you and what you should do in response then this is the book for you.
James M Scott (ed.)	<i>Exile: A Conversation with N. T. Wright</i>	For those with a background in academic theology who want to know what Wright thinks and what qualified scholars think of Wright.
Andrew T Walker	<i>God and the Transgender Debate</i>	A helpful, biblically based, introduction to the debate about transgender, and how the Church should respond to transgender people with both love and truth.

**William J Abraham, *Among the Ashes: On Death, Grief, and Hope*, Eerdmans, ISBN 978-0-8028-7528-0, £12.21.**

**Martin's opinion:**

Although this is a solid piece of theology, it is also an accessible read. It combines a painfully honest account of the experience of grief with an exploration of the philosophical and theological questions that inevitably arise when we lose someone that we love. Why did God let this happen? Where does Christ fit into the picture? What can we hope for?

It can be recommended for all those who want to explore the issues raised by their own experience of loss, for ministers who are called to give pastoral care to the bereaved, and to students who want to start to think about what Christianity has to say to those who are grieving. Sooner or later, until the Lord returns and death is no more, we are all going to be faced with the issues tackled in this book and this book helps us to face them.

**Overview:**

William J Abraham is the Professor of Theology and Wesley Studies at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University. He is well known as an author of books on theology, Methodism and evangelism.

In this latest and very personal book, which has already been published in the United States and is available in the United Kingdom in October, he explores how we can maintain our Christian hope in eternal life in the face of death. What is the nature of Christian certainty and the logic of Christian hope in the context of devastating grief?

The book opens with a stark account of the effects of grief in Professor Abraham's own life after the unexpected death of his oldest son. From this starting point, and drawing upon the classic biblical account of loss and grief in the Book of Job, Abraham goes on to consider the significance of grief in debates about the problem of evil. He then looks at what Christianity teaches about life after death and ends by relating our experiences of grief to the death of Christ.

**Sean Doherty, *The Only Way is Ethics – Part 2: Life and Death*, Authentic Media, ISBN 978-1-780781-52-5, £14.99.**

**Martin's opinion:**

This book (which is also available as a series of e-books covering each of its chapters) provides an excellent, accessible introduction to the topics that it covers. It can be highly recommended for students studying ethics at A Level or at college or university. It would also be a good idea to have a stock available in a church library or book stall for church members who want to know how to begin to think from a Christian viewpoint about key ethical issues.

**Overview:**

Dr Sean Doherty is a Church of England minister who is Tutor in Ethics and Director of Studies at St Mellitus College and one of the founders of the Living Out website. In this second volume of his introduction to ethical issues from a Christian perspective he looks at abortion, fertility treatment and adoption, and euthanasia and assisted suicide.

On abortion he argues that 'Scripture prohibits the destruction of innocent life, especially its deliberate destruction' and

...because the destruction of innocent life is so tragic and evil, even if you are not convinced that human life begins at conception, you are obliged to treat it as if it begins at conception, unless you can prove otherwise beyond all reasonable doubt.

This means that from an ethical standpoint abortion is ruled out 'simply because the pregnancy is unwanted (except when the child was conceived as a result of rape).'

In Doherty's view: 'A woman absolutely has the 'right to choose' whether to have a child or not. But that right to choose should be exercised before a man and a woman bring a child into existence.'

Doherty also contends that abortion can be permissible when it is the result of action to save the life of the mother. This is because the principle of 'double effect' means that the intention is not to kill the child but to save the mother and if the child somehow survived the physician and the mother would be overjoyed at the outcome.

On fertility treatment and adoption he argues that the 'desire of a husband and wife to have a child of their own is godly and natural' and that having fertility difficulties 'does not automatically imply a calling to adopt.' However, he also warns that:

The more we step away from seeing children as the natural fruit of sexual union between a woman and a man who have committed their lives to one another, the more we tend to see them as products.

For this reason he suggests that fertility treatment involving the use of surrogacy and donated gametes is ethically unacceptable because:

By involving a third party in their marriage, this makes conception about the desire to produce a child for the couple, rather than enabling them to be fruitfully united as God intended.

He does support IVF and artificial insemination using the gametes of a husband and wife, but suggests that a couple should not be willing to discard excess or unhealthy embryos and should bear this in mind when planning a course of treatment.

On euthanasia and assisted suicide he argues that:

Deliberately ending somebody else's life, or helping them to end their own, can never be right. It may seem kind, but it cannot really be kind to deprive them of the life that God has given them and cares about.

As he sees it, although the purpose of assisted suicide may be to end suffering:

Only God can ultimately end suffering (and he has intervened to do so). It would be idolatrous to take this role away from him – and such idolatry tends to make things worse for us in the long run not better.

**Albert Hsu, *Grieving a Suicide: A loved one's search for comfort, answers and hope*, InterVarsity Press, ISBN 978-1-78359-575-4, £9.99 (e edition also available).**

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

This book is an invaluable resource for those directly affected by suicide or those who want to understand what grieving a suicide involves. It explains very clearly, from first-hand experience, what grieving a suicide involves and how the Christian community can help those going through the grieving process. This is a book which ministers and others involved in pastoral care should read and have to hand and that churches should have copies of to lend or give away. Suicide can still be a taboo topic, but Christians need to know about it and what it means to those left behind. This book will help to provide such knowledge.

### **Overview:**

Suicide is one of the most serious public health crises of modern times, claiming over one million lives worldwide every year including over six thousand a year in the United Kingdom. It is likely that in most churches there will be people who know someone who has committed suicide or know someone who knows someone in this position. When someone takes their own life, those left behind experience tremendous shock and trauma, with a confusing mixture of emotions: anger, guilt, grief and despair. They also face heartrending questions: Why did this happen? Why didn't we see it coming? Many also wonder if those who chose suicide are doomed to an eternity separated from God and loved ones. Some may even start to ask whether life is worth living at all.

After his father committed suicide, the Christian writer Albert Hsu wrestled with all these kind of questions. In his book *Grieving a suicide*, which is a revised and expanded version of a book first published in 2002, Hsu reflects on his own experience to show how the resources of the Christian faith can point those who have lost people to suicide to the God who offers comfort in grief and hope for the future.

He writes in his introduction:

Survivors of suicide can feel as if they are caught in a winter storm of epic proportions. The road ahead looks bleak and daunting. It may not seem to lead anywhere, or you may seem to be going in circles. You may feel as if you are frozen in place. You may think that you'll die. But wherever you are on the journey, know that the path you tread is one that others have trod. I hope this book provides you with some protection in the storm, that it will guard your heart and soul during a time of terrible agony. May it provide you with some tracks to follow to make your way through.

The book is in three parts.

The chapters in part one, 'When Suicide Strikes,' look at the immediate experience of grief following a suicide. They cover the topics of 'Shock,' 'Turmoil,' 'Lament,' 'Relinquishment' and 'Remembrance.'

The chapters in part two, 'The Lingering Questions,' attempt to answer 'the haunting questions that suicides present.' These chapters look at 'Why Did This Happen?' 'Is Suicide the Unforgivable Sin?' and 'Where Is God When It Hurts?'

The chapters in part three, 'Life after Suicide,' offer 'further reflection on living one's life following a suicide.' They cover 'The Spirituality of Grief,' 'The Healing Community' and 'The Lessons of Suicide.'

Finally, an epilogue called 'Going on' looks at how life continues after suicide in the longer term.

The book also contains a list of UK resources, questions for reflection and discussion and a single-session study guide for use by suicide survivor groups.

### **Commendations:**

Kay Warren has commented:

*Grieving a Suicide* is one of the most helpful books I read after our son, Matthew, died by suicide. I scribbled notes and comments to myself on nearly every page of this revised and expanded edition, and I found Al Hsu's compassionate and practical words even more beneficial than before. He has walked this painful path and knows firsthand how to give hope and comfort to grieving people. *Grieving a Suicide* is on my list of must-read books for survivors of suicide loss.

**Timothy R Jennings, *The God-shaped brain*, IVP US, ISBN 978-0-83083-416-7, £ 11.99, (e edition also available).**

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

This is a fascinating book that draws together the insights of Christian theology and neuroscience in a new and creative way. It answers the enquirer's question 'What difference will it make if I become a Christian?' by showing how when we become Christians and learn to understand God rightly then this changes us even at the level of our brains. Through Christ, our creator literally re-creates us to make us the people he always intended us to be. This is a book that Christians should read for themselves and then loan out, or give away, to their non-Christian friends as a helpful starting point for an exploration of why embracing the Christian faith is the right thing to do.

### **Overview:**

Dr Timothy Jennings is an American Christian psychiatrist who is president of the Tennessee Psychiatric Association and a fellow of the American Psychiatric Association. His new book starts from the observation that:

Our brains are constantly in a state of flux. Moment by moment new neurons are developing and new circuits are being laid down, new axons and dendrites are forming for the facilitating of new messages to the neurons. At the same time, unused connections are removed, dormant nerve tracks are pruned back and unused neurons are deleted. Incredibly, our beliefs, thoughts and behaviors and even our diets change our brain structures, ultimately changing who we are.

Based on this observation, his book then goes on to explore:

... the amazing ability of our brains to adapt, change and rewire based on the changes we make, the beliefs we hold and the God we worship - as different 'God-concepts' affect the brain differently.

Jennings' argument is that our brains and bodies thrive when we have a healthy understanding of who God is.

As human beings we are designed for 'healthy relationships of love and trust.' Unfortunately, many of us have distorted images of God and mostly think of him in 'fearful, punitive ways.' This leads us into unhealthy patterns of self-defeating patterns of behaviour and toxic relationships.

However, our lives can change when God renews our minds with a truer picture of him. When we understand the biblical teaching about God as good and loving, then we can begin to flourish.

### **Commendations:**

Curt Thompson writes:

Paying attention to the findings of neuroscience is tantamount to paying attention to God's creation. And doing that leads us – with the proper guide – to God's story and his intentions for us. Tim Jennings is that proper guide. An experienced healer with a palpable spirit of humility, he takes the reader past the trite, superficial motifs of easy spirituality that clutter our emotional landscapes and grounds you first in the nature of the God of Scripture. He then further explores that in which God grounded the first humans – the body, and namely, the brain. With compelling stories of challenge and transformation, Dr. Jennings deftly weaves together a deeply thoughtful theology of the living Word with the complex nature of the organ that our heart calls home. Read this book to know God more fully. Read this book to know your brain more fully. And see how knowing God will change your brain – and your life – in ways you never thought possible.

**Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: Learning To Care Like Jesus*, SPCK, ISBN 978-0-28107-833-2, £9.99 (e edition also available).**

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

As one reviewer has written, *Ministries of mercy* is 'well written, balanced, insightful, down-to-earth, and recommended for churches and individuals ready to meet both the spiritual and physical needs of those in their community.' It would make an excellent basis for a sermon series and the questions provided at the end of each chapter would make it equally useful for study in a home group. Highly recommended for anyone who wants understand the theological basis for mercy ministry and how to go about it in practice.

### **Overview:**

Tim Keller is a well-known and highly respected American minister and writer. He is the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City and is the author of numerous books, including the bestselling *The Reason for God: Belief in an age of scepticism*.

*Ministries of mercy: Learning to care like Jesus* is a revised British edition of a book previously published in the United States with the sub-title *The call of the Jericho road*. This original sub-title helpfully indicates that Keller's starting point in the book is Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-27. As Keller explains in his Prologue, the concept of 'ministries of mercy' is taken from verse 37 of Luke 10:

...where Jesus commands us to provide shelter, finances, medical care and friendship to people who lack them. We have nothing less than an order from our Lord in the most categorical of terms. 'Go and do likewise!' Our paradigm is the Samaritan, who risked his safety, destroyed his schedule, and became dirty and bloody through personal involvement with a needy person of another race and social class.

The book is divided into two parts.

Part 1, 'Principles,' sets out the theological principles underlying the exercise of ministries of mercy by individuals and churches. This part looks in turn at 'The Call to Mercy,' 'The Character of Mercy,' 'The Motivation for Mercy,' 'Giving and Keeping: A Balanced Lifestyle,' 'Church and World: A Balanced Focus,' 'Conditional and Unconditional: A Balanced Judgment' and 'Word and Deed: A Balanced Testimony.'

In this part Keller argues on the basis of the teaching of Scripture that:

The ministry of mercy is the meeting of 'felt' needs through deeds. As agents of the kingdom, the Church seeks to bring substantial healing of the effects of sin in all areas of life, including psychological, social, economic and physical.

He further contends that showing mercy in this way is:

....such an essential mark of being a true Christian that it can be used as a test of true faith. Mercy is not optional or an addition to being a Christian. Rather, a life poured out in deeds of mercy is the inevitable sign of true faith.

He then goes on to explain that the Bible teaches that Christians need to balance the call to be generous in showing mercy to others with the need to provide for the needs of their own families, to care both for Christians and non-believers, to show unconditional love, but also challenge destructive behaviour, and to both preach the word *and* practice deeds of mercy 'each carried out with the single purpose of the spread of the kingdom of God.'

Part 2, 'Practice,' looks at 'Getting Started,' 'Preparing the Church,' 'Mobilizing the Church,' 'Expanding your Vision,' 'Managing your Ministry,' 'Mercy Ministry and Church Growth,' and 'Meeting Needs.'

In this part Keller argues that every individual Christian and every Christian family ought to be engaged in ministries of mercy, but so too should each individual church. He then goes on to look at how churches can be prepared and mobilised to engage in ministries of mercy and how there needs to be proper planning and coordination in order for such ministries to be maintained and grow. Finally he looks at how to integrate mercy ministry and evangelism and how to help families that have 'physical, economic, emotional and social needs.'

### **Commendations:**

Archbishop Sentamu declares:

I recommend this book to all who would heed Jesus' call to become ministers of mercy: to walk with him along the paths of justice, mercy and truth that stretch out before us today.

## **Tremper Longman III, *The Fear of the Lord Is Wisdom: A Theological Introduction to Wisdom in Israel*, ISBN 978-0-80102-711-6, £24.62 (e edition also available).**

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

This is a thorough and up to date piece of scholarship by a first rate Old Testament scholar, but it is sufficiently accessible to be read with profit by those who are beginning their study of the Old Testament. It will be an extremely valuable resource for those studying the Old Testament and biblical theology at university or theological college. It will also be of value to ministers and others who want an update on what biblical scholarship now has to say about how to understand the wisdom tradition in the OT and in the Bible as a whole.

### **Overview:**

Tremper Longman III is Distinguished Scholar of Biblical Studies at Westmont College in Santa Barbara in the United States. He is the author of numerous well regarded books on the Old Testament and the history of Israel.

As he explains in the Prologue, the purpose of his new book is to 'explore wisdom in the Bible.' 'We will focus,' he says, 'on the OT, Israel's wisdom. Ultimately, however, our study is a work of Christian biblical theology; thus, we will be examining how the NT appropriates the wisdom of the OT.'

The book is in five parts:

Part 1, 'The heart of wisdom' looks at the three books that 'have the most pervasive and intense presentation of wisdom in the OT' – Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job.

Part 2, 'Other Sources of Wisdom,' looks at wisdom in other OT books. It looks at wisdom material in Deuteronomy, Psalms, Song of Songs, and in the prophetic books and in the stories about Joseph, Daniel, Adam and Solomon.

Part 3, 'Israel's Wisdom: Cosmopolitan or Unique?' looks at whether wisdom is depicted as a universal phenomenon or as something unique to Israel. It considers 'Sources of wisdom,' 'Wisdom, Creation, and (Dis)order.' 'Israelite Wisdom in Its Ancient Near Eastern Setting' and 'Wisdom, Covenant, and Law.'

Part 4, 'Further Refining Our Understanding of Wisdom,' looks at three further issues concerning wisdom in the OT. These are 'The Consequences of Wise and Foolish Behavior,' 'The Social Setting of Wisdom' and 'Wisdom and Gender.'

Part 5, 'The Afterlife of Israel's Wisdom,' looks at what is said about wisdom in the Jewish intertestamental literature from the Apocrypha to the Dead Sea Scrolls and the development and appropriation of the OT wisdom tradition in the New Testament. In relation to the New Testament Longman looks at how it depicts Jesus as the 'ultimate sage' and what it says about Christians and wisdom.

The book finishes with two appendices. The first, 'Wisdom in the Twenty-First Century,' draws together Longman's main conclusions and how he thinks we should understand OT wisdom 'in its broader (Christian) canonical context as well as its continuing significance for life today.' The second, 'Is Wisdom Literature a Genre?' makes out the case for seeing a distinctive category of wisdom literature in the OT.

### **Commendations:**

Carol Kaminski has commented:

With masterful elegance Longman navigates through the topic of wisdom in the Old Testament, making a compelling and exegetically rich argument that wisdom is not independent of the redemptive-historical narrative of the Old Testament but intrinsic to it. Insightful and refreshing, this brilliant exposition of wisdom is a must read for anyone seeking a more coherent theology of wisdom and its place in the canon.

**Ashley Null, and John W Yates III (eds.), *Reformation Anglicanism*, Crossway, ISBN 978-1-43355-213-7, £26.72 (e edition also available).**

**Martin's opinion:**

This book helps to answer questions about what it means to be Anglican. It will be an invaluable resource that will enable students, ministers, and anyone else interested in the future of Anglicanism, to get their bearings by understanding how the Anglican Communion arose out of the Reformation and how the bedrock theological principles identified at the Reformation still remain vital for those who want to uphold a biblically faithful form of Anglicanism in the twenty first century. Highly recommended.

**Overview:**

This book is the first volume in what is planned to be a six volume 'Reformation Anglicanism Essential Library' and has been written to serve as a 'go-to resource aimed at helping clergy and educated laity grasp the coherence of the Reformation Anglican tradition.'

The book was written by Michael Jensen, Ben Kwashi, Michael Nazir-Ali, Ashley Null, and John W. Yates III, authors who are 'representative of the geographic and ethnic diversity' of the Anglican Communion. The chapters were written independently by these authors and retain the unique voices but the content is based on 'extensive conversation' between them and is an attempt 'to speak with a single voice, one that makes Reformation Anglicanism accessible and relevant today.'

The book looks at 'the founding documents of the English Reformation' and argues that:

Within these founding formularies a well-refined and theologically rich vision emerges, one that is rooted in Scripture and aligned with the teachings of the early church. It is a vision we believe is capable of reinvigorating our global communion and providing clarity in the midst of mass confusion over our shared identity. Furthermore, we believe that the rich theological heritage of the Reformation is able to give us practical guidance on life and ministry in this twenty-first century.

The book is in three main parts.

- Chapter 1 provides 'a sweeping historic narrative of the missionary birth of the church in England, the maturing of English Christianity during the Reformation, and the expansion of this renewed apostolic faith through overseas missions in the five centuries that have followed.'
- Chapter 2 then examines 'the age of the Reformation and the chief personality at the center of the English Reformation: Thomas Cranmer.' This chapter introduces 'the Anglican Formularies and the theological convictions that lie at their core.'
- Chapters 3–6 'examine Anglicanism's bedrock theological principles: sola Scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide, and soli Deo Gloria' ('the Bible alone,' 'by grace alone,' 'by faith alone' and 'to the glory of God alone').

The book finishes with a manifesto for Reformation Anglicanism as the way forward for the global communion.

As the book's Preface notes:

Recent fissures within the Anglican Communion have left those who are part of it asking questions of foundational import: What does it mean to be Anglican? What is the nature of our global communion? To what extent are we bound to one another by shared doctrine, history, and culture? These critical questions lead to even deeper questions: What is the gospel? What is the nature of God's grace, our faith, and eternal life? What authority does Scripture possess, and how are we to apply it?

**Michael Reeves and John Stott, *The Reformation: What you need to know and why, Monarch*, ISBN 978-0857218742, £5.99 (e edition also available).**

**Martin's opinion:**

A huge number of books have been published this year to mark the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the Reformation. Where this book stands out is in providing a concise, readable introduction to the story and significance of the Reformation from a traditional, orthodox, Evangelical standpoint. If you are an Evangelical and want to know why the Reformation should matter to you and what you should do in response then this is the book for you. It would make an excellent basis for a teaching course in church or for people to look at together in a home group.

**Overview:**

In this new book issued to mark the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the Protestant Reformation, two Evangelical stalwarts, Michael Reeves, Professor of Theology at the Union School of Theology, and the late John Stott, explain what happened at the Reformation and why it still matters today.

The book is in two main parts.

In Part I, 'The story and significance of the Reformation,' Michael Reeves gives a fast-paced overview of the history and theology of the Reformation.

In Part II, 'Keep the faith and pass it on,' which is an update of an address first given in 1982, John Stott looks at the essence of the Evangelical faith taught to us by the Protestant Reformers and responsibility we have to hold it fast and pass it on to future generations.

There are also three appendices.

The first is an explanation by Alan Purser of the meaning of Jesus' prayer for the unity of his Church in John 17. The second is the text of Martin Luther's *95 Theses*, the key text that sparked off the Reformation. The third is a series of questions for study and reflection.

**James M Scott (ed.), *Exile: A Conversation with N. T. Wright*, IVP Academic, ISBN 978-0-83085-183-6, £30.11 (e edition also available).**

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

As a collection of academic essays this volume is a book written by scholars for other scholars. Those with no background in academic biblical studies and theology will therefore find it hard going. However, those who do have such a background, know about Wright's thesis, and want to think further about it, will find this book an invaluable resource. We hear at first hand from Wright why he still thinks the idea of exile and return is central to the message of the New Testament and we also get a series of first class scholarly assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of Wright's position. If you want to know what Wright thinks and what qualified scholars think of Wright then this is now the book to go to.

### **Overview:**

One of the marks of truly great scholars is the way that their ideas set the agenda for discussion in their fields. In the case of N T Wright his central idea, which has set the agenda for much contemporary discussion in the fields of both biblical studies and theology, is that the idea of exile and return from exile is fundamental to the teaching of the New Testament.

According to Wright, the majority of Jews in the New Testament period believed that the return from exile in Babylon that took place in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah was not the fulfilment of the promise of return from exile made by God through the Old Testament prophets. This meant that they believed that the day of deliverance from exile was still to come and it was this day that they were waiting for as they lived under Roman rule.

The message of the New Testament, Wright argues, is that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ the promised day of deliverance has come.

Many scholars, and many ordinary Christians, have found this a compelling new way to understand the New Testament. Many others, however, have been critical arguing that Wright's thesis fails to do justice to what we know both about first century Judaism and about what the New Testament itself actually says.

In November 2010 Wright went to Trinity Western University in Canada and took part in a symposium on the theme of the exile. The purpose of this symposium was to provide an opportunity for Wright to re-articulate his thesis about Jewish belief in a continuing exile and to then invite scholars from a variety of academic disciplines to interact with that thesis from their own particular vantage points. *Exile : A Conversation with Tom Wright* emerged out of this symposium. As the editor of this volume, James Scott, explains:

Many of the essays that are included in this volume originated as papers read at the symposium, although they were revised—often quite substantially—for publication. The rest were commissioned in order to provide additional coverage of the subject from other perspectives.

As Scott further explains:

The essays in this volume are divided into four main sections and are framed by contributions from N. T. Wright. In his lead essay, Wright reasserts his thesis about the ongoing exile with renewed vigor and fresh insight, marshaling additional evidence in support of his case. Thereupon follows a series of responses to this essay from specialists in various fields: part one contains essays with a focus on aspects of Wright's thesis relating to the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint; part two pertains to early Judaism; part three concentrates on the New Testament; and part four on theology. The goal in each case is not simply to applaud Wright's approach but to assess it critically from a particular vantage point and, if possible, even to go beyond it in some way. Finally, Wright receives the last word in an essay that provides a rejoinder to the foregoing scholarly responses to his thesis.

### **Commendations:**

Michael Bird has written:

N. T. Wright's thesis that most Second Temple Jews believed that they were in a protracted state of punitive exile, despite the fact that many Judeans had returned to the land from Babylon, is one of the most exciting and controversial proposals in biblical scholarship. In this volume, James Scott has assembled a wonderful cast of scholars to prod, evaluate, critique, and engage Wright's thesis about exile in biblical theology, Jewish literature, and as a theological idea in the New Testament. It's the best exploration to date of what it meant for the Jewish people, including the early church, to look forward to the day when 'many will come from the east and west to recline in the company of Abraham.

**Andrew T Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate*, The Good Book Company, ISBN 978-1-78498-178-5, £7.99 (e edition also available).**

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

This book is a helpful, biblically based, introduction to the debate about transgender which covers much the same ground as Vaughan Robert's book, but in much more detail. It doesn't go into any detail about the nature or treatment of gender dysphoria (for that you will need to read Mark Yarhouse) and it does not engage with the theological arguments put forward by those who seek to justify gender transition on Christian grounds (for that you need to look at my study). However, if you want a thorough, biblically based approach to the theological issues in the debate and how the Church should respond to transgender people with both love and truth then this is a book you should read.

### **Overview:**

As the discussion of transgender issues starts to loom larger in both society and the Church a range of helpful Christian introductions to the debate about these issues is now beginning to appear. Alongside Mark Yarhouse's *Understanding Gender Dysphoria* (IVP Academic 2015) Vaughan Robert's *Transgender* (The Good Book Company 2016), and my study *Transgender Liturgies* (Latimer Trust 2017), we now also have Andrew T Walker's book *God and the Transgender Debate*.

Dr Walker is Director of Policy Studies for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention in the United States. As he explains in the opening chapter of his book, his starting point is the observation that a debate is now taking place in Western society 'about what it means, if anything, to be a man or a woman.' For Walker:

...it's important that God's voice is heard in this debate. That's what this book is about. It's not a medical or psychological study, nor is it a statistical analysis or political manifesto. It's aiming, as clearly as possible, to let God's voice be heard.

The book is in five sections.

Chapters 2–4 look at 'how we've gotten to where we are now as culture, what it means to be transgender, and why and how people reach such different positions in this debate.'

Chapters 5–7 examine 'what the Bible says about humanity, and therefore about gender.'

Chapters 8–11 ground what the Bible says in the real lives of ordinary people, looking at:

- what this means for those who wish to love transgender neighbours
- what Jesus says to those who experience gender dysphoria or who identify as transgender
- how Jesus challenges local churches to show compassion to every person that enters our churches, regardless of who they are and what they think, while also taking seriously the truth of God's word
- how parents might speak to their children about gender identity.

Chapter 12 gives a series of 'answers to important questions that the previous chapters haven't dealt with' such as 'Should I mind if people who are biologically the other sex are in my restroom? What if it's my kids in the restroom?' and 'Is it true that Christian teaching is harmful because not affirming a transgender person's identity leads to depression and higher rates of suicide?'

Finally chapter 13 looks at how the scarred hands of the crucified and risen Christ show that by coming to him we can find a way out of 'all our struggles and brokenness,' including in the area of sexual identity.

Walker's overall theological position is that while experiencing gender dysphoria is not in itself sinful, giving into it by undergoing transition to live as a member of the opposite sex is sinful because it involves the rejection of God's 'blueprint' for his human creatures.

In this situation, he says, the Bible tells us that:

....the answer to the person struggling with gender dysphoria is the same as the person struggling with any other product of the fall – there is hope, there can be change, and there will one day be total transformation.

And the answer to the person who has acted on their gender dysphoria, seeking to tear up the blueprint is the same as to the person who has torn it up in any other way (which is all of us) – another took the fall for that, bore the condemnation for that rebellion, and offers you freedom.

However, according to Walker, the Biblical message also addresses those who are not suffering from gender

dysphoria and have not undergone transition. It says:

We are to love our neighbor, every neighbor. Before we challenge another person about their life, we must challenge the person we see in the mirror about their love. Love does not mean we sacrifice truth on the altar of popularity. Love does not mean sacrificing conviction. In fact, love demands that we don't. But love does mean deliberately, prayerfully and thoughtfully extending respect, empathy, compassion, and patience to everyone, equally and indiscriminately.

**Commendations:**

Rod Dreher writes :

Gender-identity questions are among the most radical of our time – and the church is not prepared. Andrew T Walker has thought deeply about these things, and is an invaluable guide for faithful Christians walking through the heat and confusion of this debate.