

# Latimer Trust

## Monthly Reading List – May 2022

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
Scott David Allen	<i>Why Social Justice is not Biblical Justice: An Urgent Appeal to Fellow Christians in a Time of Social Crisis</i>	This is an important book for our times. It outlines what the ideological social justice movement stands for, why its key tenets are opposed to biblical teaching and how Evangelicals should respond creatively to the inroads it has made, and is still making, in both society and the Church. This is an urgent wake-up call to right thinking.
Gerald Bray	<i>How the Church Fathers Read the Bible: A Short Introduction</i>	This is a very helpful introduction to the nature and development of Patristic biblical interpretation and to the lessons the Fathers have to teach about how we should view and read the Bible today. It is written in an accessible style that makes it ideal for a reader who is approaching this topic for the first time. It is also ideal for students at university or theological college or for the general Christian reader who simply wants to know more about the topics it covers.
Sharon James	<i>Lies We are Told, the Truth We must Hold: Worldviews and their Consequences</i>	James' book is a vitally important tract for our times. It explains in a clear and accessible way the genesis and effects of the lies that have come to dominate Western society, and then goes on to show why biblical teaching offers a better alternative than these lies and how Christians should live on the basis of this teaching. This is a key text which needs to be read, pondered, shared and widely publicised.
Preston Sprinkle	<i>Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say</i>	This book is an important contribution to the Christian discussion about transgender because it gives a comprehensive survey of the main issues under discussion. It shows why we should maintain the traditional view that there are two sexes, that sex is determined by people's bodies, and that people should live in a way that reflects their sex. It is important because it emphasises that, while maintaining our theological principles, we must also embody God's outrageous grace to trans people. This is a book which Christians should buy, read, lend, discuss with others, and seek to act upon.
Graham Tomlin	<i>Navigating a World of Grace: The Promise of Generous Orthodoxy</i>	This is a stimulating account of the orthodox Christian faith and the nature and calling of the Christian Church which succeeds in showing why orthodox Christian theology and ecclesiology offer a better vision of the world than either secularism or heresy. This is a very useful book for Christians who want to be helped to think more deeply about their own faith and it is also a book that could be given to thoughtful enquirers. There are aspects of what is said in the book that Evangelicals might want to question, but as a whole this is a very useful text that can be strongly recommended.

Scott David Allen, *Why Social Justice Is Not Biblical Justice: An Urgent Appeal to Fellow Christians in a Time of Social Crisis*, Credo House Publishers, ISBN 978-1-62586-176-4, £11.60 (Audio and e editions also available).

#### Overview:

Scott Allen is an American Christian leader and writer who is president of the Disciple Nations Alliance, a Christian discipleship ministry whose mission is to transform broken communities by equipping Christians with an empowered biblical worldview.

As he explains in the introduction, the starting point for his book *Why Social Justice Is Not Biblical Justice* is the fact that in recent years the ideology that he calls 'ideological social justice' has made 'deep inroads into the very heart of the Evangelical church.' In his view this ideology is a 'false worldview' that brings with it the 'bitter fruit' of 'enmity, hostility, suspicion, entitlement and grievance.'

The purpose of his book is to provide a wake-up call to his fellow Evangelicals to recognise and reject the influence of this ideology and to provide a better Christian alternative. In his words, it is a call to:

Recognize and reject the counterfeit. Remember what true justice is. Hold fast to that truth, no matter how unpopular. Speak it out. Demonstrate it. Be the salt and light Jesus commands us to be.

Following the Introduction, the book consists of eight chapters.

Chapter 1, 'Strange justice,' notes the growth of ideological social justice as the 'successor ideology' to the 'older Judeo-Christian worldview that shaped the West and America for centuries' and the fact that there is now: '... a growing trend of leading Christian voices wittingly or unwittingly promoting ideological social justice inside the church and sowing confusion by equating it with biblical justice.'

Chapter 2, 'Biblical justice,' sets out the biblical view of justice. This view sees justice as rooted in the being of God 'the Creator of the universe, whose character is goodness, righteousness, and holiness (or moral perfection).' God has communicated what it means to act justly through the knowledge of his will present in every human heart and through the Ten Commandments, and what acting justly involves is both 'communitive justice' in which everyone is treated as uniquely valuable and their God-given rights are respected and 'distributive justice,' in which the authorities ordained by God render impartial judgement, rewarding that which is good and punishing that which is evil.

Because of the Fall, human beings fail to do what is just and therefore all deserve punishment, but because God is merciful as well as just: 'God incarnate, in an act of sheer love, took upon Himself the punishment we deserved for our transgressions in order to show us a mercy we could never deserve.'

All this being the case, the calling of Christians is 'to let the world know that mercy and forgiveness are available through the finished work of Christ' and to give our neighbours a foretaste of the perfect justice of God's coming kingdom 'by modelling justice in our relationships and in fighting injustice wherever it appears.'

Chapter 3, 'Justice before the judgement,' explains that societies shaped by biblical justice will be societies which acknowledge God as the 'transcendent lawgiver,' respect the rule of law, human dignity, and God-given human rights, seek to check corruption, establish and uphold due legal process, and entrust final judgement to God, understanding that 'not every wrong will be righted this side of Christ's return.'

Chapter 4, 'Justice redefined' explains how ideological social justice, rooted in Marxism and Postmodernism and rejecting the authority of God, has redefined justice to mean:

The tearing down of traditional structures and systems deemed oppressive, and the redistribution of power and resources from oppressors to victims in pursuit of equality of outcome.

Chapter 5, 'The ideology's core tenets,' sets out how ideological social justice answers a series of key questions such as 'What is ultimately real?' 'Who are we?' 'What is our fundamental problem as human beings?' 'What is the solution to our problem?' 'How can we be saved?' 'What is our primary moral duty' 'How do we know what is true' 'Who has

ultimate authority' and 'Is there a future, final judgement?' and explains how these answers are contrary to the biblical worldview.

Chapter 6, 'The Ideology's values and disvalues' explores the way in which the ideological social justice movement emphasises the two values of 'equality' and 'diversity' and 'disvalues,' or is hostile to, Western civilization in general and existing American society in particular. It also looks at the 'real world consequences' of these values and disvalues in terms of there being less gratitude and more grievance, less personal responsibility and more victimhood, the erosion of the rule of law, the loss of due process, the loss of free speech, the loss of belief in truth, the erosion of religious liberty, the loss of the gospel, the loss of civility, social unity and tolerance, and the loss of any hope for future, final justice.

Chapter 7, 'Inroads into the culture...and the church,' considers how 'ideological social justice has become hugely influential in contemporary American culture and mainstream Protestant denominations and how it is now infiltrating Evangelicalism. In the face of this situation, the 'crying need' is for Christians:

.... to recover a biblical, orthodox approach to justice and cultural engagement. *At the same time, we must speak out against unbiblical social justice ideology.* We need to re discover and champion a deeply biblical approach to cultural engagement, in ways that lead to greater justice and human flourishing, and not to abandon these things as a distraction from our core mission.

In short, the church must return to a comprehensive biblical worldview. Biblical justice is far too important, and far too central to the Christian worldview, for us to allow it to be compromised by an impostor such as social justice.

Chapter 8, 'Driving out a bad worldview by offering a better one,' explains in more detail how Christians should offer a better alternative to ideological social justice. Allen's conclusion is that:

This is a dangerous moment for evangelicals in the West. Our confusion over social justice needs to be replaced by careful discernment. If we continue to allow the yeast of social justice to contaminate our theology at a time when the culture desperately needs to see true, biblical justice advocated and lived out, the losses will be incalculable both in time and in eternity. As well, if we throw out the biblical justice baby with the social justice bath water those who care for the oppressed will rightly call us hypocrites, 'The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you' (Romans 2:24 ESV).

So, let's fight for justice in this world. Let's fight for the victims of injustice. Let's oppose sex trafficking. Female infanticide. The unborn at risk in their mothers' wombs. Those persecuted for their beliefs, Christian and non-Christian. Let's speak up for those facing execution unjustly. These fellow image bearers are not facing microaggressions. They are facing macro aggressions, including torture and violent death.

Martin's opinion:

*Why Social Justice is Not Biblical Justice* is an important book for our times. It outlines with great clarity what the ideological social justice movement stands for, why its key tenets are opposed to biblical teaching and how Evangelical Christians should respond creatively to the inroads it has made, and is still making, in both society and the Church. This is an urgent wake-up call to right thinking and right action that Evangelicals need to hear and act upon, not just in the United States, but here in Britain as well. All those who are church leaders, or who are training to be church leaders should read this book, and they should encourage as many lay Christians as possible to read it as well.

Commendations:

Kelly Kullberg writes:

Scott Allen carefully reveals how ideological social justice is a new religious replacement for the Judeo-Christian worldview. If we allow its social engineers to succeed, both the church and the world will suffer immeasurably. No longer will human beings have a basis of unalienable rights, intrinsic worth, and freedom to flourish. Only biblical truth is true love. I urge you to read and share this book immediately and widely!

Gerald Bray, *How the Church Fathers Read the Bible: A Short Introduction*, Lexham Press, ISBN 978-1-68359-583-0, £19.99 (e edition also available).

#### Overview:

Gerald Bray is research Professor of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School of Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama and a research fellow of the Latimer Trust. He is the author of numerous well-regarded books on theology and Church history.

As its title declares, his new book from Lexham Press is a short introduction to how the Bible was read 'by those ancient Christian writers who are collectively known as the 'fathers of the Church,' writers such as Irenaeus, Athanasius, Augustine and John Chrysostom.

The book consists of six chapters.

The first Chapter 'What is Patristic Biblical interpretation?' explains the history of the study of how the Fathers read the Bible, what precisely the term 'Bible' means in this context, who the Fathers were and what authority they have had in the subsequent history of the Church, and finally what is meant by biblical interpretation 'as opposed to mere quotation or allusion to texts that were familiar to many.'

The second Chapter, 'The Clash of Worldviews,' explains how the first Christian writers developed a way of reading the Bible in the context of dialogue with both Jews and pagans and looks at how they held that:

...there were four main principles on which biblical revelation was based – monotheism, creation, theodicy (the nature of evil) and eschatology – each of which had to be understood and accepted before Christianity could make serious headway.

It also explains that while the Fathers borrowed the language and concepts of contemporary philosophy in order to be understood by pagan readers they also proclaimed 'that those concepts had to be understood as aspects of revealed truth, not as conclusions drawn from human speculation.'

The third Chapter, 'The Four Senses of Interpretation' looks at how the Fathers developed the idea that there were four dimensions of meaning which could be found in the biblical text. These dimensions or 'senses' which reflected the existence of human beings as creatures with bodies, souls and spirit were originally the bodily sense, the moral sense, and the spiritual sense with latter being later divided into two senses, one referring both to the life of the Christian in this world and one to the life of the Christian in the world to come. The chapter also explains how:

The four senses of interpretation encouraged metaphorical readings of the biblical text, and especially of the Old Testament. Some of these interpretations respected the historical context of the original text and applied it to a spiritual understanding by way of what we call typology. But other interpretations ignored the original sense of the text and spiritualized it completely as allegory.

The fourth Chapter, 'The Search for Consensus,' considers how in the fourth century 'there was a reaction against the excesses of allegorical interpretation and a renewed emphasis on the literal sense of the biblical text.' It also considers how the greater interest of the Western Church in eschatology led to it taking a more positive view of the Book of Revelation than was the case in the Eastern Church. Finally, the chapter explains how in the Eastern Church biblical interpretation 'came to be codified in a series of extracts that were grouped together as catenae ('chains') which became the standard basis for later interpretation,' whereas in the West the leading interpreter of the Bible was Augustine who developed a reading of the Bible based on the belief 'that the Christian life is fellowship with a God of love who has created all things for the benefit of his human creatures.'

The fifth Chapter, 'Case Studies,' gives examples of how the Fathers interpreted ten significant biblical texts. The Old Testament texts are Genesis 1:26-27 (the image of God), 1 Samuel 28:13-14 (Saul and the witch of Endor), Psalm 22:1-8 (the cry of dereliction), Song of Songs 2:1-4 (the bridegroom and the bride) and Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6 (the messianic oracles). The New Testament texts are Matthew 4:1-11 (the temptations of Jesus), John 3:3-8 (the new birth), Romans 5:12-14 (the nature of sin), Hebrews 11:1-3 (the nature of faith) and Revelation 20:1-6 (the eschatological millennium).

The final chapter, 'Seven theses on how the Church Fathers read the Bible' considers seven 'fundamental principles' for reading the Bible which we learn from the study of the Fathers and which 'remain authoritative guides for the Church today.' These principles are:

1. The Bible contains the sum of Christian doctrine and is its only source.
2. The Bible is a revelation from God and the ultimate foundation of all knowable truth.
3. Jesus Christ is the theme of the Scriptures, which must be interpreted in the light of his life, death and resurrection.
4. The substance of the biblical message is more important than its form.
5. The validity of a particular interpretation of the Bible must be tested against the text and not be determined by the standing or reputation of the interpreter.
6. The modern church must respect the Fathers and be prepared to learn from them, without idolising them or claiming for them an authority that they did not claim for themselves.
7. The Bible must be read understood in the context of praise and worship.

Martin's opinion:

*How the Church Fathers Read the Bible* is a very helpful introduction to the nature and development of Patristic biblical interpretation and to the lessons the Fathers have to teach about how we should view and read the Bible today. The book is based on up-to-date Patristic scholarship, but it is written in an accessible style that makes it ideal for a reader who is approaching Patristic biblical interpretation for the first time. This is an ideal guide for students at university or theological college or for the general Christian reader who simply wants to know more about the topics it covers. As C S Lewis famously argued, it is important for Christians to read 'old books,' but sometimes a bit of help is required for people who are beginning to do this and that is what Bray's volume provides. Highly recommended.

Commendation:

Christopher Hall states it's 'A reliable road map for students beginning their journey with the fathers.'

Sharon James, *Lies We are Told, the Truth We Must Hold: Worldviews and Their Consequences*, Christian Focus, ISBN 978-1-52710-796-0, £9.99 (e edition also available).

#### Overview:

Sharon James is a British Christian speaker and writer who works for the Christian Institute. Her previous books include *How Christianity Transformed the World* and *Gender Ideology: What do Christians Need to Know?*

Her new book starts from the observation that in Western society:

Increasingly it's believed that Christians are on the wrong side of the argument and the wrong side of history. Religious belief, especially biblical morality, is blamed for propping up a repressive and patriarchal system that enshrined inequality. Those who speak out for biblical Christianity face accusations such as 'bigot,' 'transphobe,' or 'fundamentalist.' Many Christians are scared into silence. Others, wanting to avoid confrontation, go along with current trends, and keep quiet about the ways in which biblical truth is denied. Some celebrate the whole package, and rewrite biblical morality to suit the current times.

In James' view:

.... Each of these options (silence, acquiescence, celebration) buys into lies and ignores the truth. They shut down the only real answer for human suffering. It is right to be angry about injustice and suffering. But we need to understand the real causes if we are going to arrive at real solutions. We don't need to be ashamed of Christ; we don't need to be intimidated by the claims of those who are militantly opposed to the Bible.

The purpose of James' book is to equip Christians to avoid being intimidated by those opposed to biblical teaching. In order to achieve this end, she first of all explains why the ideas underlying the contemporary assault on orthodox Christianity are lies which have dire real-world consequences. She then goes on to explain why a biblically based Christian worldview provides a better alternative to these lies.

In Part I of the book (Chapters 1-6), James undertakes the first task by looking at 'The lies we are told.'

In Chapter 1 she explains that:

By the end of the nineteenth century, increased acceptance of evolutionary theory had contributed to a naturalistic worldview: 'There is no Creator God, and there won't be a judgement.' This had profound implications: human beings are no longer given unique dignity, there is no purpose in history, death is the end and there is no absolute morality or universal religious truth.

In Chapter 2 she further explains that:

Trailblazers in the liberation of humanity from the fear of God included Ludwig Feuerbach, Charles Darwin and Karl Marx. Once God is denied, the next thing to be challenged is the notion that there is one absolute moral code which we all have to obey. This led straight to the horrors of the gulags and the inhumanities perpetrated during the Cultural Revolution. Bad ideas bear bitter fruit.

In Chapter 3 she notes that progressive ideologues such as:

Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Wilhelm Reich and Margaret Sanger saw themselves as saviours, liberating people from the repression of traditional morality. They dreamed of a future of unlimited personal freedom. But in a fallen sinful world, the dream of unbounded freedom unravels inexorably into nightmare. As moral norms are eroded, the powerful use their power to exploit the weak. Violence and evil are not only normalised, they are celebrated. Sexual liberation has resulted in historically unprecedented global rates of fatherlessness.

In Chapter 4 she observes that without a 'transcendent authority,' there is no basis on which to judge between competing truth claims. As a result: 'confidence that our problems would be solved by human reason and science collapsed into the radical doubt of postmodernism.' This in turn led to the emergence of 'critical theory:

The pioneers of critical theory wanted to bring about a society where all inequalities in outcome were removed. The 'hegemony' of established institutions had to be undermined. This could be attempted by using radical doubt (aka critical theory) to question all objective truth, including scientific truth (and much that had previously assumed as 'common sense'). Critical theory has taken root in all the major institutions of the West. At a popular level, we are all now expected to join the battle to achieve 'absolute' freedom and 'absolute' equality.

In Chapter 5 she traces the spread of critical theory and the negative consequences this has had in terms of the rise of identity politics:

Critical theory began in the universities, but as graduates entered all the various professions, the result at a popular level has been the rise of 'identity politics'. Many view the West as inherently evil (racist, patriarchal, capitalist). Some activists want to destroy the very structures which have created freedom and prosperity: 'Smash the patriarchy' (aka the family), 'Smash capitalism' (aka wealth creation and private property), 'Smash the police' (aka law and order), 'Smash down the statutes' (aka our collective memory and history). The essential unity of the human race, and the essential dignity of human identity, are both undermined by the current insistence on pushing people into groups defined by their diverse characteristics.

Finally, in Chapter 6 she considers how the Christian church has responded to these developments:

Confusingly, some clergy seem to have cheered it on! Challenges to the authority of Scripture lie behind the rise of unbelief within the professing church. Some 'Christian' ministers paint evil as good, good as evil, and mock the idea of judgement and hell.

In Part 2 (Chapters 7-10) James then goes on to look at 'The truth we must hold.'

In Chapter 7 she explains that in biblical teaching:

God is the Creator, and the ground of truth, justice and morality. Our creation in the image of God is the only firm foundation for the respect of human rights. The Bible affirms both the dignity of every individual person, and the essential unity of the human race. Because of the fall into sin, oppression and suffering are endemic to human existence. Every individual is morally responsible, but forgiveness is offered to all in Christ.

In Chapter 8 she notes that this biblical worldview provides:

... the foundation of human flourishing in society. God designed family and work. The married family should not be undermined. Property should be protected, and work should be rewarded. We need to learn from the past and allow for innovation in the present. Civil authorities should be supported. All human institutions are answerable to God, which provides a bulwark against oppression. The division of the world into nation states offers protection from the threat of global tyranny.

In Chapter 9 she further notes that the biblical worldview is also:

.... the foundation of future hope. God has good purposes for this world. He will bring about complete justice, and restoration of the whole creation, when Christ returns.

Finally in Chapter 10 she describes how:

Christians are not just to know the truth, but to live it. We are created to live for God's glory. Worship should be the pulse of our existence. When we love and fear God, we won't fear anyone or anything else. Loving God and loving our neighbour includes sharing the good news of salvation and working for our neighbour's good.

Martin's opinion:

Like Carl Trueman's *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, James' book is a vitally important tract for our times. It explains in a clear and accessible way the genesis and effects of the lies that have come to dominate Western society, and then goes on to show why biblical teaching offers a better alternative than these lies and how Christians should

live on the basis of this teaching. This is a book which should be studied by all those training for ministry so that they understand the world in which they are called to minister and how the Church should respond to it. It is also a book which should be read by lay Christians who want to understand the world in which we now live and how to live rightly and effectively for Christ within it. This is a key text which needs to be read, pondered, shared and widely publicised.

#### Commendation:

Wayne Grudem has written:

This is a remarkable book. Sharon James brings the skills of a trained historian to the task of explaining what has gone so horribly wrong in society today. Her analysis is consistently fascinating, insightful, and filled with biblical wisdom. The book concludes with a call for Christians to courageously proclaim the truths about God and his creation that will overcome the destructive lies so influential in modern thinking. Anyone seeking to understand why society seems to be falling apart, and what we can do about it, needs to read this book. Highly recommended!



Preston Sprinkle, *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say*, David C Cook, ISBN 978-083078-122-5, £11.99 (Audio and e editions also available).

#### Overview:

Preston Sprinkle is an American Christian ethicist and theologian who is the President of the Center for Faith, Sexuality, and Gender. He has previously written an award winning book on homosexuality and the Christian faith, *People to be Loved*, and in his new book *Embodied* he addresses the issue of Christianity and transgender.

His new book is in three sections.

The first section runs from Chapter 1 to Chapter 9. In Chapter 1 Sprinkle uses a series of stories about real people to illustrate that when we are discussing transgender, we are discussing a 'diverse group of beautiful people created in God's image' who are 'often marginalized and misunderstood, shamed and shunned by those who don't share their experience.' In Chapter 2 he gives a 'survey of the most important terms and phrases in the trans conversation.' In Chapter 3 he explains that the term 'trans' covers a range of different types of people with different types of behaviour and different experiences. In Chapters 4-6 he looks at what the Bible has to say about biological sex, how what the Bible says about biological sex relates to the issue of gender roles, and whether the revisionist readings of the Bible put forward by trans activists are convincing. In Chapter 7 he considers people with intersex conditions and finally in Chapters 8 and 9 he looks at whether there can be a male brain or soul in a female body or vice versa.

His conclusion at the end of this first part is that if we ask the question 'If someone experiences incongruence between their biological sex and their internal sense of sex, which one determines who they are – and why?' then:

... the Bible and science offer much more evidence to support the view that biological sex determines who we are. Our sexed bodies determine whether we are male, female, or both; and our embodiment is an essential part of how we image God in the world. I don't think the Bible or science offer enough evidence to suggest that our gender (identity or role) overrules our sexed identity, even if we experience incongruence.

However, we should never downplay the significance of person's experience or their internal sense of who they are. These can feel more real than the air we breathe. Any credible application of the conceptual points I've made must understand this: experiences might not define who we are ontologically, but they are nonetheless very real and significant. We can get the Bible right - but if we get love wrong, we are wrong.

The second section of the book is an 'Interlude' in which Sprinkle writes about 'giving a bunch of talks on transgender identities' at Biola University in California. In this interlude he reflects on the fact that how we talk about transgender is as important as what we say, and his experience of receiving the 'kindness of God' from a group of LGBT+ students.

The third section of the book runs from Chapter 10 to Chapter 12. In Chapter 10 Sprinkle looks at the topic of Rapid-Onset Gender Dysphoria. In Chapter 11 he considers the question of 'whether a disciple of Jesus should transition.' Finally in Chapter 12 he explores 'various questions related to pronouns, bathrooms, and sleeping spaces.'

After this third section there is a concluding chapter in which Sprinkle declares that:

Christians should exude the outrageous love of Christ toward those struggling with their gender or entangled in the web of deceptive ideologies. Yes, we should resist and deconstruct those ideologies with thoughtfulness and grace. But if that's all we do, we fail to embody the presence of Christ in the world as we ought.

We need less outrage and more outrageous love.

He goes on to say that:

Posture is crucial in this conversation. As Christians, we already have many strikes against us. We are known for being anti-gay, judgmental, hypocritical, anti-trans, anti-Target, anti-this, anti-that. Jesus was against many things, but somehow he had a reputation of being *for* people. Somehow Jesus was able to have a clear ethical stance, to speak out clearly against sin, and yet to still draw to himself the very people who were found guilty by his words.

As the number of trans people in the world increases, our church should have more trans people coming not fewer. Not because our ethic is weakening or unclear, but because it is strong and holistic - true, courageous, compassionate, and humble. If people - especially marginalized and broken people - come into our communities, they should never want to leave.

An appendix to the book explores the issue of the suicidality of trans people, recognising that this is a serious issue, but challenging the simplistic 'transition or suicide' narrative put forward by some trans activists and noting that this 'might actually increase suicide attempts among trans people rather than reduce them.'

#### Martin's opinion:

This book is an important contribution to the Christian discussion about transgender. It is important because it gives a comprehensive and up-to-date survey of the main issues under discussion. It is important because it shows why we should maintain the traditional view that there are two sexes, that sex is determined by people's bodies, and that people should live in a way that reflects their sex. Finally, it is important because it emphasises that, while maintaining our theological principles, we must also embody God's outrageous grace to trans people in the way we relate to them and in the welcome that we offer them in our churches. This is a book which Christians should buy, read, lend, discuss with others, and seek to act upon.

#### Commendation:

##### Sean McDowell comments:

There are many good books written on transgender identities, but if you are looking for one book that is scientifically sound, theologically grounded, and gracious in its demeanor, *Embodied* is the book to get. Whether you are a scholar looking to understand the issue more deeply, a parent trying to help his or her transgender child, a friend wanting to better love transgender people, or someone wrestling with your own gender identity, this book will be an indispensable resource. My thanks to Sprinkle for writing and researching such an important and timely book.

Graham Tomlin, *Navigating a World of Grace: The Promise of Generous Orthodoxy Paperback*, SPCK, ISBN 978-028108-285-8, £12.99 (e edition also available).

#### Overview:

Graham Tomlin is a British theologian who is currently Bishop of Kensington and President of St Mellitus College. Later this year he will take up the post of head of Church of England's Centre for Cultural Witness. Tomlin is the author of numerous books on doctrine, church history and apologetics. His new book, which builds on a previous book he edited entitled, *The Bond of Peace: Exploring Generous Orthodoxy*, is an explanation and defence of Christian orthodoxy over against heresy.

As he writes in his introduction:

In this book, I would like to suggest that Christian orthodoxy offers us a map to the island of life. Far from being a narrow, restrictive set of beliefs orthodoxy is liberating and creative. Through the Catholic creeds, it indicates what is important, what to see and what to investigate. It shows us the contours, the hills and the valleys, and helps us to understand what is true about this land. Yet orthodoxy also has its shadow side: the concept of heresy. Heresies, in this image, are pathways, ways of thinking and believing, that may seem initially attractive but, if followed too far, will lead us towards the cliffs and eventually to destruction. In short, orthodoxy reveals a bigger world than we could ever imagine, while implicitly warning us about what could lead us in harmful directions.

The book is divided into two parts.

Part I is called 'The generosity of orthodoxy.' It begins in Chapter 1 by looking at the origins and nature of the Creeds. In this chapter Tomlin declares that the Creeds:

.... emerged through the early Christian context of persecution from the need to confess the faith both within the church and outside it, and from the debates about the identity of Christian faith in those early centuries. At their heart, however, they are an instinctive response to the grace and mercy of God in Jesus Christ. As such they are far more than a mere list of items to be assented to or restrictive straitjacket on thinking. They are statements of personal allegiance and even of defiance to a world that is a long way away from the purposes of its Creator. The orthodoxy that creeds points to is therefore not just about correct opinions but embraces intellectual belief, ethical decision making, a healthy life and Christian worship.

Chapters 2-5 then look at the four key articles of the Nicene Creed, belief in God the Father as the creator of heaven and earth, belief in Jesus as the incarnate Son of God, belief in Jesus's death and resurrection, and belief in the Holy Spirit as the Lord and giver of life.

In relation to each article Tomlin explains the meaning of the article and how it provides us with a better and more expansive understanding of our life in this world.

For example, in Chapter he 2 declares that if (as the Nicene Creed declares):

.... this world came into being from the father, through the Son, under the brooding of the Holy Spirit, then this world suddenly seems bigger, more expensive, more generous. The world not only carries scientific meaning but moral and spiritual meaning as well. In the light of God's self-revelation in Christ in the scriptures, it can be a source of spiritual wisdom and growth. This perspective gives us a solid basis for both scientific exploration and, as we shall see in the next chapter, for artistic creativity. It is the example of how Christian orthodoxy is not only *generous* but *generative* of creative and exploratory thinking. The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and the doctrine of the incarnation provide a grounding for seeing that world as a home full of grace, meaning and sense.

For another example, he explains in Chapter 3 that the Creed's affirmation of the incarnation:

.... tells us that, in Jesus Christ, we do not see just another fine picture of human capacity to inspire us to emulation or perhaps to depress us at how far short we fall of our own potential. Instead, we see God himself reaching out to us in our weakness, compromise and failure, and enabling our hearts to grow in their capacity to love the God who loves us and all those made in his image. He gives us not just a passing gift, but he gives us himself.

Part 2 is called 'The orthodoxy of generosity.' The overarching theme of this part, which runs from Chapter 6 to Chapter 10, is that: 'The heart of orthodoxy is the overflowing generosity and grace of God and its goal is the formation of generous people.'

In the individual chapters in this part Tomlin first considers in Chapter 6 how God's generosity is at the heart of the orthodox faith and how our generosity is the 'only appropriate response to it.'

In Chapter 7 he then goes on to look at how the various heresies ruled out by Christian orthodoxy:

... would give us a smaller, restricted and narrowed view of both God and the world. They would give us a God who does not give us himself. They would give us a world that is not the gracious gift of this generous God but (in the case of Gnosticism) the half-baked mistake of a second rate divinity.

In Chapter 8 he draws on C S Lewis' image of Christian orthodoxy as a hallway with the various Christian traditions as rooms opening off from it and argues that implicit within the concept of generous orthodoxy is the idea:

... that each Christian acknowledges, owns and values that own tradition for what it is but, in conversation with other traditions, both appreciates the strengths and weaknesses of their own tradition and what can be learned from others. So it is perfectly fine to be evangelical, a Charismatic, a Catholic, a Calvinist, a Pentecostal, a Baptist and so on. What does not work is to believe that my own tradition is somehow final and there is nothing to learn from Christians who inhabit other parts of the Christian faith. We live in and value our own rooms yet we can learn a great deal by passing through the hallway to visit the rooms of others.

In Chapter 9 he goes on to ask what are the 'bonds that hold the Church together' and 'where do the limits lie on agreement in Christian belief' such that to go beyond these limits takes you beyond the 'bounds of Christian unity.' The answer that he gives is that:

The Scriptures, as read through the lens of the creeds, maintained and guarded from age to age and place to place by bishops and read, believed and lived out by the baptized, provide the bonds that hold the Church together and define the boundaries of the Church's faith.

Furthermore, he says, as Augustine argued, the unity of the Church is built up by love for our fellow Christians and our refusal to give up on them, which is why 'schism, as an act against love, is a sin.'

Finally, in Chapter 10 Tomlin looks at the four credal marks of the Church (one, holy, catholic and apostolic) and considers how they offer us a 'radical vision of community' that 'helps us to find new ways to address some of the seminal issues of our day: diversity, race, wealth and purpose.'

For example, he writes that:

Holiness as generosity, seeing money and wealth as means of blessing others rather than safeguarding our own future, is a radically alternative way of life in acquisitive and money obsessed culture. If the church is to be a community in which this way of life can be learned, it will need to exercise this at the corporate level. This means hard choices about the use of resources.

Where the church has the opportunity to help, it will mean, for example, using land and property to help meet the housing needs of those who have little access to affordable homes rather than just seeing such resources as there to pay a church's bills.

An appendix to the book gives the text of the Nicene Creed.

Martin's opinion:

*Navigating a World of Grace* is a stimulating account of the orthodox Christian faith and the nature and calling of the Christian Church which succeeds in showing why orthodox Christian theology and ecclesiology offer a better vision of the world than either secularism or heresy. This is a very useful book for Christians who want to be helped to think more deeply about their own faith and it is also a book that could be given to thoughtful enquirers as the basis for serious discussion with them about the Christian view of the world. There are aspects of what is said in the book that Evangelicals might want to question. For example, they might want to question what seems to be an implicit assumption that there is no good reason to prefer one Christian tradition over another and they would certainly want to question Tomlin's claim that all separation is schism and therefore sin. These aspects of the book are unfortunate, but as a whole this is a very useful text that can be strongly recommended.

Commendation:

Tom Holland comments:

Learned and wise, this is a book that achieves what even many Christians may find a startling feat: a demonstration that orthodoxy is far more radical and interesting a concept than heresy.