

Latimer Trust

Monthly Reading List – June 2025

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
Robert Bowman and Ed Komoszweski	<i>The Incarnate Christ and His Critics: A Biblical Defense</i>	<i>The Incarnate Christ and His Critics</i> is a book that is scholarly and comprehensive. It is also readable. It will prove invaluable to anyone who wants an in-depth discussion of the New Testament evidence for the deity of Christ. Strongly recommended.
Paul Copan and Michael Reardon	<i>Transformed into the Same Image: Constructive Investigations into the Doctrine of Deification</i>	This is not a collection of essays for beginners in theology, as the essays it contains all assume a good degree of prior theological knowledge. For anyone who already knows something about the doctrine of deification and wants to be pushed to think more deeply about it, this collection of essays will prove to be an invaluable resource.
Jonathan Macy	<i>Sowing Seeds with Songs of Joy: Growing God's Garden in Forgotten Places</i>	This is an important contribution to Christian thinking about how Christians should address the related issues of material and spiritual poverty in areas of deprivation. It is readable, based on solid theology, informed by reliable social research, interviews, and personal experience. This is a book that deserves to be widely read and whose arguments need to be carefully thought about and then acted upon.
Thomas Schmidt	<i>Josephus and Jesus: New Evidence for the One Called Christ</i>	This is an important study that deserves to be read by all serious students of the historical Jesus and the early Church. It shows that the independent witness of Josephus. This book is yet another piece of evidence that scholarly scepticism about the New Testament witness is based on a failure to take the evidence we have seriously. If you follow the evidence, it points you inexorably to what Christians have always believed.

Eric Varden	<i>Chastity: Reconciliation of the Senses</i>	<i>Chastity</i> is a book which will be useful for any Christian seeking to understand afresh the classical Christian vision of what it means to live an integrated life as someone created by God in His image and likeness. Varden's book is worth reading because it reminds us of this truth and what its implications are for the way we should live as Christians in today's world.
-------------	---	---

Robert Bowman and Ed Komoszweski, *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics: A Biblical Defense*, Kregel Academic, ISBN 978-0825445798, £35.72 (e and audio versions also available)

Overview:

Robert Bowman and Ed Komoszweski are two American biblical scholars. As they explain in their Preface, the subject of their new book

...is the doctrine of the incarnation: the teaching that Jesus Christ is the eternal son, God by nature, come in the flesh as a real human being. Our purpose is to provide a rigorous, fact-based defence of this doctrine popularly called the deity of Christ. We argue both that the deity of Christ is the teaching of the New Testament writings and that it is solidly based in the facts about Jesus.

As they go on to say, the book is:

... a cross disciplinary study of biblical Christology, comparative religion, and historical Jesus studies. By integrating these disciplines as we have done here, we hope to present a truly comprehensive presentation of the biblical evidence for the incarnation. Because the book responds to what alternative Christologies and sceptical views of Jesus say about the teachings of the Bible on the subject, we have given it the subtitle *A Biblical Defense*. Thus, this study is concerned with the interpretation of the biblical texts in their ancient contexts. We do comment on issues in historical theology, systematic theology and philosophy of religion in appropriate places, but our focus is on the biblical material.

In the Introduction to their book, they further explain that:

Many of us were taught to defend the deity of Christ using one or two verses, such as John 1:1 ('and the Word was God') or John 20:28 (where Thomas calls Jesus, 'My Lord and My God'). To be sure, we will say something about these important texts. But there is so much more. The biblical evidence for the incarnation is not limited to a few verses but covers a wide range of closely related truths about Jesus taught repeatedly in one biblical book after another. The incarnate Christ is therefore a major theme throughout the New Testament. Recognising that theme in all of its many expressions will not only equip you to defend the doctrine of the incarnation, but it will also help you in your faith in Jesus and makes your understanding of Scripture much richer.

Throughout this book we will not only cite biblical passages in support of the deity of Christ but will discuss their interpretation. Along the way, we will interact with a wide range of contemporary biblical scholarship. Notes provide a wealth of references to academic literature-commentaries, published doctoral dissertations, periodical articles, and a specialised studies - of relevance to the subject matter...

in addition to presenting the New Testament evidence for the deity of Christ and explaining its relevance to the Christian life, we want to equip you to remember this information and to be able to present it to others. To that end, we organise the biblical teaching on the deity of Christ into five categories that will be both memorable and easy to explain. We summarise these five categories using an acronym based on the word *HANDS*. This acronym recalls the dramatic experience of Thomas told in John 20:24-29. Despite what the other disciples told him, Thomas doubted that Jesus had risen from the dead. But when he saw the marks left in Jesus'

hands by the nails of the crucifixion Thomas was persuaded of more than the resurrection. Amazingly, he called Jesus his Lord and his God (John 20:28). Just as an examination of the nail prints convinced Thomas he was beholding the hands of deity, a closer look at the Bible reveals that Jesus shares the HANDS of God:

H – Honors (Jesus receives the **honors** due to God.)

A – Attributes (Jesus possesses the **attributes** of God)

N – Names (Jesus bears the **names** of God)

D – Deeds (Jesus does the **deeds** that God does)

S – Seat (Jesus occupies the **seat** of God's throne).

This acronym, introduced in our earlier book *Putting Jesus in His place*, is a tested and proven device for remembering and explaining the biblical evidence for the incarnation. Each chapter will go into detail on the biblical teaching relating to one aspect of the five- point outline.

Martin's Opinion:

The Incarnate Christ and His Critics is a book that is scholarly and comprehensive. It is also readable and (thanks to the use of the HANDS acronym) a book whose overall argument is easy to remember. It will prove invaluable to anyone who wants an in-depth discussion of the New Testament evidence for the deity of Christ. It is a must read for theological students and ministers and also for intelligent lay Christians who want to be able to give a confident and informed answer to someone who asks them 'And why do you believe that Jesus is God.' Week by week Christians affirm in the words of the Nicene Creed that Jesus 'God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God.' This book explains clearly and persuasively why it is right for them to do so. Strongly recommended.

Commendations:

Mark Keown declares

'In an age where Jesus is understood as fiction, a good teacher, an angelic demigod, a swearword, one of many gods, a construct, and more, this book is a brilliant defense of the deity of Christ. Engaging superbly with biblical texts and theological writers, Bowman and Komoszewski take readers on a journey that leads to the only possible solution considering the evidence--Jesus is God the Son. Great theology should lead to worship, deeper love for others, a desire to live as God's Word Jesus did, and then to tell the world about him. This book does this outstandingly. This writing should be added to reading lists for Christians in churches and seminaries across biblical studies, history, theology, worship, evangelism, comparative religions, and apologetics. It should be translated into multiple languages and distributed throughout the world. It is exceptional.'

Paul Copan and Michael Reardon (eds), *Transformed into the Same Image: Constructive Investigations into the Doctrine of Deification*, IVP Academic, ISBN 978-1-51400-984-0, £31.99 (e edition also available).

Overview:

This new collection of essays published by IVP Academic is the fruit of a series of discussions about the doctrine of deification, the doctrine that Christians become 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4), which have taken place for over a decade under the auspices of the Evangelical Theological Society.

As Paul Copan and Michael Reardon explain in their introduction to the collection, such discussion would not have taken place until recent years because:

Prior to the Second World War, deification, was somewhat of a 'despised archaism' in the Christian West, especially in Protestant circles. Viewed charitably, it was an eccentricity of Eastern Orthodoxy, but far more often it was portrayed as one of the remnants of a regrettable Hellenized trajectory in patristic Christianity.

However, as they further explain:

This landscape shifted dramatically with the ascendancy of Tuomo Mannermaa's Finnish interpretation of Luther, a rereading of the mercurial monk that linked his doctrine of justification to themes of union, participation, and a deification. Beyond causing a stir within Lutheranism, deification has since played a key role in Orthodox-Reformed dialogue, Baptist-Orthodox dialogue, and evangelical theologies that aspire to incorporate scriptural statements about participation in God and union with Christ that transcend purely forensic or juridical themes. Additionally, scholars have demonstrated how themes of union and participation can be understood as deification- or at least intrinsically linked to deification, in a host of significant Protestant thinkers such as John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli, Peter Martyr Vermigli, Richard Hooker, John Owen, John and Charles Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, Herman Bavinck, C.S. Lewis, T.F. Torrance, Karl Barth and Robert Jenson.

Today deification is in vogue and does not appear to be going out of fashion any time soon.

As a result of this continuing interest in the topic, no fewer than ten collections of essays on the subject of deification have been published in recent years. Nevertheless, as Copan and Reardon note, nearly all the essays in these collections:

... discuss the contours and content of deification in one of two ways: (1) as understood in Eastern Orthodox or Roman Catholic contexts or (2) in a manner primarily or completely subsumed under discussions of soteriology.

What is distinctive about the new collection of essays, they write, is that it:

... extends beyond these two limited lines of inquiry. Several essays in this collection, whether explicitly or implicitly, offer tightly focused inquiries into Protestant conceptions of deification (e.g., Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist, Wesleyan, Pentecostal, evangelical). Perhaps even more uniquely, several of these essays contain constructive investigations into the doctrine of deification apart from its relationship to Christian salvation. Concerning this latter feature of the volume, readers will encounter chapters that discuss the fruitfulness of deification in theological education, the similarities and differences between Christian deification and

secular transhumanism, the relationship between linguistic translation philosophy and the visibility of deification in Scripture, the presence of deification in theologies emerging from the Global South, how deification is embedded within various scriptural images (e.g. the Levitical grain offering, the body of Christ, and the new Jerusalem), the relationship between the doctrine and Christ's pre-incarnate existence, and so on. These novel and creative investigations, we believe and hope, positively contribute to the ever-growing body of literature about deification.

The collection consists of sixteen essays under three headings, 'Biblical foundations,' 'Protestant foundations' and 'Constructive investigations into the doctrine of justification.' Contributors to the collection include Ann Jervis on 'Conformity to Divine Messiah in Paul.' Alister McGrath on 'Deification or Christification? Martin Luther on Theosis', Jahdiel Perez on 'From Bios to Zoe – C. S. Lewis on the Doctrine of Deification' and Kimbel Kornu on 'Transhumanism as active effort of technology versus deification as active reception of grace.'

Martin's Opinion:

This is not a collection of essays for beginners in theology, as the essays it contains all assume a good degree of prior theological knowledge. It is also not a collection that will provide people with an introduction to the doctrine of deification. The essays assume that their readers already know what the doctrine involves. It is, however, a collection that will provide students of theology with an existing knowledge of the doctrine of deification with the opportunity to explore the doctrine from an Evangelical perspective, in new and sometimes unexpected ways. For anyone who already knows something about the doctrine of deification and wants to be pushed to think more deeply about it, this collection of essays will prove to be an invaluable resource.

Commendations:

Jared Ortiz has written:

'A fascinating collection of studies on the theological and practical meaning of deification. These refreshing essays show how Protestant theology creatively appropriated—and continues to creatively appropriate—traditional notions of deification in light of particular doctrinal commitments and pastoral contexts. The editors and authors are to be commended for challenging the false idea that deification is merely an Eastern doctrine, while also firmly demonstrating the biblical roots, Protestant appropriation, and evangelical possibilities of this foundational Christian teaching.'

Jonathan Macy, *Sowing Seeds with Songs of Joy: Growing God's Garden in Forgotten Places*, New Generation Publishing, ISBN 978-1-83563-690-9, £10:99 (e edition also available).

Overview:

Jonathan Macy is a Church of England Vicar in South East London and is Chair of NECN (National Estate Churches Network).

His new book is about the ministry of the Church in areas of social deprivation. It has its origin a paper he wrote for the Church of England Evangelical Council's workstream on Poverty, Class and Privilege.

The book consists of ten main chapters.

Chapter 1 begins: '...by defining terms, mainly what are privilege, class and poverty, as well as looking at Maslow's hierarchy and the Pareto principle.' 'Maslow's hierarchy' is a way of classifying the various needs that human beings have and the 'Pareto principle' is the principle that 'wealth (or potentially many other things) gets focussed in small areas – that 80% of the wealth is focussed in 20% of the population.'

Chapter 2 is:

... a Scriptural and theological chapter. Flowing from above there are several theological issues to address in order to frame what is going on. We will think about blessing and hierarchy and responsibility, the Law for the whole People of God, a biblical view of justice, the role of Church toward the world, ending with what Jesus' enigmatic comment '*the poor are always with you*' may mean.

Chapters 3-5 provide:

... a broadbrush of key issues, including the relationship between society and Church. This will consider the societal reality of poverty and the reality of churches doing ministry in these areas. We will also think about how ministry looks different there and that often in the most deprived places it could be no other way.

Chapters 6-8 contain:

... a series of case studies based around various interviews I did. One may call it 'Views From The Coal face.' We will think about poverty and ministry in rural contexts, urban contexts, coastal towns, as well as the various types of estates, which can be both mono and multicultural. All have unique features, yet the overlap, and the similarities which run across all of them are more than incidental.

Chapter 9 considers poverty and disability:

A chapter on disability and poverty might not be obvious in a book like this, but it is the result of being on the ground and scratching beneath the surface of the community and seeing what is really going on. Over half of all households with a person with a disability live below the poverty line, and therefore areas of poverty are too often where people with disabilities become concentrated. They are an unavoidable part of the landscape being ministered into which one needs to be aware of.

Chapter 10 proposes:

... some ideas for how the whole church can begin to address the problem together. There is a theology of interdependence that true Body of Christ must live out, but this is more than money and requires a whole new view of what resources are and resourcing is, and what they can be for our joint calling to minister with and to the poor.

In a concluding chapter Macy sums up his argument by declaring:

Concern for the poor is a Gospel concern. All are made in God's image and all are created to know, love and serve Him. Any solution to poverty and associated issues demand evangelism and proclamation of Christ as a non-negotiable focus, but social justice can be relegated to a side issue, or as an issue for one group in a church (e.g. those who run the Food Bank), as opposed to a core part of what Gospel proclamation and action is. We need to be able to distinguish Gospel and the effects of Gospel - they are different. Alleviation of poverty is not the Gospel itself, but it is a required outcome of it.

Therefore, to do nothing is not an option. Gospel churches must proactively address the poverty before them, and wealthier ones look to support those in areas of poverty so they can maintain their work and witness. Poverty does not limit the impact of the Gospel. The simple jawbone of an ass picked off the floor is as much of a killer now as it was then. The Gospel is the answer to poverty - both in the now and the future hope of new Heavens and New Earth, but the now is only a taste of what is to come. None will hunger. None will thirst. And a feast of wonderful food will be available to all.

In the present, God's approach to poverty is both individual (the Good Samaritan addressed the man he came across) and corporate (the attitude of the Law for the whole people of God, as well as the Church in Acts seeing widows needed proper provision in parallel to preaching). Communal responses are central. God often describes to the wider people of God, those in need using the catch all term, *widows, orphans and aliens*. All three groups have relational loss that has led to material lack. God's Gospel includes both material provision and relational provision. Throwing money at the problem is not the answer. Generosity, with gospel focused relationships is. The changed heart and life of a person will receive and use material blessing better than one who is not rooted in Christ. Ultimately poverty is caused by a broken relationship with one or all of God, self, family and society. The Gospel restores and redeems all of these – the full Gospel is central to the alleviation of poverty, so remember the poor.

Martin's Opinion:

Sowing Seeds with Songs of Joy is an important contribution to Christian thinking about how Christians should address the related issues of material and spiritual poverty in areas of deprivation. It is a book that is readable, that is based on solid theology and that is informed by reliable social research, by interviews, and by personal experience. Jonathan Macy helpfully outlines what poverty involves in Britain today and how responding to poverty through both material and relational provision is a necessary implication of the Christian Gospel. This is a book that deserves to be widely read and whose arguments need to be carefully thought about and then acted upon.

Commendations:

Keith Sinclair comments:

'It is a wonderful book, full of scripture, wisdom and stories. God showing the depths, the height, the breath and the length of his saving love in real places with real people... Jonathan has chapters on outer estates and seaside towns and rural England and much more. He writes personally and he writes truthfully, and he writes with a challenge I pray the whole church will embrace. There are many

forgotten places in which God wants to grow his garden; this book will help you see how you can help with the sowing, and the singing.'

Thomas Schmidt, *Josephus and Jesus: New Evidence for the One Called Christ*, OUP, ISBN 978-0-19286-678-3, £99.00 (e edition also available).

Overview:

Thomas Schmidt is an American biblical scholar who specialises in the study of the historical Jesus, the Early Church, and early Eastern Christianity. He is an associate professor at Fairfield University and a visiting fellow at Princeton.

His new book published by Oxford University Press is a study of what is known as the *Testimonium Flavianum*. This is a short statement by the first century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus that runs as follows:

And in this time there was a certain Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man, for he was a doer of incredible deeds, a teacher of men who receive truisms with pleasure. And he brought over many from among the Jews and many from among the Greeks. He was [thought to be] the Christ. And, when Pilate had condemned him to the cross at the accusation of the first men among us, those who at first were devoted to him did not cease to be so, for on the third day it seemed to them that he was alive again given that the divine prophets had spoken such things and thousands of other wonderful things about him. And up till now the tribe of the Christians, who were named from him, has not disappeared.

If it is authentic, this statement is the earliest non-Christian witness to Jesus we possess. However, many scholars have argued either that the entire statement is a Christian invention or that pro-Christian material has been inserted into Josephus' original text.

In his book Schmidt re-examines the issue of the authenticity of the *Testimonium Flavianum* and argues that suggestions that it was fabricated by the early Christians or that they interpolated Christian material into it are unconvincing. In his words, Schmidt's conclusion is that:

Gathered in aggregate and squarely faced, the *Testimonium Flavianum* gives every sign of authenticity. The reasons for this, coming down to essentials, are founded in the TF's vocabulary, phrasing, reception, content, and context—all of which agree with early Jewish tendencies in general and with Josephus' tendencies in particular. The TF should hence be attributed to Josephus with much confidence.

This conclusion though is not in accordance with previous scholarly theories which assert that the TF suspiciously contradicts Josephus' writing style and that it contains claims unlikely to have been made by the Jewish historian. The results of this book's investigations instead show that the TF actually matches Josephus' style quite precisely and that its content is very like the things which Josephus often says elsewhere.¹ Not only this, but the TF is suffused with words, claims, and turns of phrase that were not used by ancient Christians, and that come across as written by a non-Christian.

Furthermore, Schmidt argues, what Josephus writes is an important independent source of evidence concerning Jesus because it is very likely that he knew people who actually took part in Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin. As Schmidt puts it:

It is probable, therefore, that Josephus knew some who participated in judicial proceedings against Jesus, whether 'first men', chief priests, or members of the Sanhedrin—for he was well connected to each group and each group had a hand in Jesus' crucifixion. And, it turns out, the affairs of Josephus' life have so ordered themselves that it is even possible to identify several

persons, known to Josephus, whom he likely had in mind when speaking of those 'first men among us' who accused Jesus.

In addition, he declares:

Aside from these persons, there are also any number of other individuals whom Josephus may have met during his years in Galilee or his decades in Jerusalem whom he could have heard speak of Jesus. These include a great range of people, from various chief priests, to the scions of the Herodian dynasty, to the leaders of the Sanhedrin, to the common folk of Jerusalem and Galilee, to even Josephus' own father and mother.

According to Schmidt, what Josephus tells us about Jesus is as follows:

Jesus was a Jew who was crucified by Pontius Pilate, during the reign of Herod Antipas the Tetrarch and under the high priesthood of Caiaphas, while the emeritus High Priest Ananus I still held great sway. Before Jesus' death he was known as a wise man who taught simple, basic truths, but who was also a polarizing figure, with some wondering if he was more than human and others thinking he was less. His disciples were many and included both Jews and non-Jews. These were perhaps not particularly educated and were prone to being overzealous. Aside from Jesus' teaching ministry, he also performed miracles that were viewed by some as being gotten by sorcery. Others, however, believed him to be the Christ. After he was crucified by Pontius Pilate at the behest of Jewish leaders, his disciples claimed that he had been resurrected three days later and that he fulfilled Jewish prophecy. These followers of Jesus were called 'Christians' and still existed at the end of the first century.

The importance of this testimony for the study of Jesus and early Christianity is that it confirms:

... the outlines of what the New Testament documents declare. Most striking of all is that Josephus' testimony quite clearly proposes that Jesus did in fact perform miracles and that the belief about his resurrection and fulfilment of prophecy was not developed years after Jesus lived, but was, to quote Josephus, already held by the disciples of Jesus 'on the third day'. This point is considerably fortified by the fact that Josephus was quite capable of criticizing supernatural claims. But instead of classifying the miraculous reports of Jesus as the outgrowth of later myths and legends, he rather presents them as being contemporaneous with Jesus and the apostles.

All this suggests that there was no long, postmortem period where Jesus went from humble teacher to resurrected wonderworker, a period in which the basic claims of Jesus' miracles and resurrection grew like coral on a reef, with one person expanding and exaggerating the imagination of the previous. Rather, such fundamental beliefs about Jesus were present from the beginning of the Christian movement, and were disseminated by Jesus' own disciples and even, it seems, by his enemies.

Josephus, after all, was directly familiar with those Jewish leaders who attended judicial proceedings against not only Jesus but also against the apostles James, Paul, and likely Peter and John too. At such trials, Josephus' acquaintances extracted testimony from Jesus and the disciples regarding their beliefs, often under threat of execution. Hence these Jewish leaders would have been reliable informants for Josephus to learn about the teachings of Jesus and his followers.

All this urges the further inference that the early Christian movement was not so divided as sometimes supposed. It is agreed by scholars that four of Jesus' early apostles—Peter, James,

John, and Paul—were the most prominent leaders of the early church. Some scholars however go on to hypothesize that these four strongly disagreed on significant matters. Over and against this hypothesis stands Josephus' *Testimonium Flavianum*. For Josephus seems to have been in touch with individuals who put all four of these apostles on trial, yet he does not depict a Christian movement riven by disagreement, nor does he set forth an account of Jesus far different from that presented by the New Testament documents. It stands to reason that whatever conflicts the four leading apostles may have had with one another, these did not concern the fundamental beliefs sketched out by Josephus.

Martin's Opinion:

This is an important study that deserves to be read by all serious students of the historical Jesus and the early Church. It shows that the independent witness of Josephus, a well-informed Jewish historian with access to first-hand information about Jesus and the emergence of Christianity, corroborates what the New Testament tells us about these matters. This book is yet another piece of evidence that scholarly scepticism about the New Testament witness is based on a failure to take the evidence we have seriously. If you follow the evidence, it points you inexorably to what Christians have always believed.

Scmidt's book is very expensive in printed form and is even quite expensive as an e book. However, at the moment it can be read for free online at: <https://academic.oup.com/book/60034>.

Commendations:

Peter Williams writes:

'The argument of this book is potentially of greater significance for the study of the historical Jesus than the announcement of any of the apocryphal gospels that have made headlines. Here we have a bold new argument undergirded by meticulous research on a well-known text. How could Josephus in his *Antiquities* sound so Christian when describing the life of Jesus Christ? Schmidt not only makes a strong case for the authenticity of Josephus' testimony to Jesus, but also shows that we have been misreading it. Earlier interpreters were less inclined to view Josephus' words as entirely positive. To cap it all, Schmidt argues that Josephus probably received information about Jesus from those who were at his trial. This book should be widely read and discussed.'

Eric Varden, *Chastity: Reconciliation of the Senses*, Bloomsbury, ISBN 978-1-39941-141-7, £14.99 (e edition also available).

Overview:

Eric Varden is a Norwegian monk and theologian who is the Roman Catholic Bishop of Trondheim. In his new book he explores the meaning of the much-misunderstood Christian virtue of 'chastity.'

As he explains at the start of his book: 'chastity is not coterminous with celibacy. Celibacy is a particular, not particularly common, vocation. Chastity is a virtue for all.'

The confusion between the celibacy and chastity to which Varden refers here is a common feature of much of the contemporary discussion of Christian attitudes to same-sex relationships. Those Christians who take a traditional view of sexual ethics are often accused of 'wanting all gay people to be celibate.' This accusation is unjust because there is nothing in traditional Christian sexual ethics that says that those who experience same-sex attraction necessarily need to renounce the possibility of marriage to a person of the opposite sex (which is what celibacy means). Those who uphold traditional Christian ethics are not therefore calling 'gay people to be celibate.' What they are saying is that those with same-sex attraction, like everyone else, need to exercise the virtue of chastity.

The declaration that everyone needs to exercise the virtue of chastity begs the question of what the content of this virtue is, and that is the subject of Varden's book.

The book is in five chapters.

In the first chapter, 'Norma's question,' Varden introduces the subject matter of his book. He explains the origins of the word chastity in classical antiquity, noting that the Latin word *castus* (from which the word chastity is derived) was originally 'a marker of integrity, of a personality whose parts are assembled in harmonious completeness.' This being the case, to be unchaste 'is to corrupt the elegance of a coherent whole by introducing elements not connatural to it.'

As Varden goes on to explain:

From this semantic base, '*castus*' found its way into the terminology of sexual morality, whether to describe an object ('a chaste marriage bed'), a person ('a chaste matron'), or a physical feature ('a chaste countenance'). These notions are far from the mindset suggested by the mediaeval 'chastity belt,' a metal cast with lock and key designed to place the sexual organs out of bounds, whether such a contraption was ever used, or merely reflects the prurient fantasy of later times.

For one thing, chastity is not a denial of sex. It is an orientation of sexuality, of the whole vital instinct towards a desired finality. It is a function of wholeness sought, and healing found.

According to Varden the common idea that chastity means a rejection of sex involves the loss of:

... a vision of 'chastity' supposing, not the suppression or oppression of sex, but its maturing, with a view to flourishing and fruitfulness. In a Christian optic, one would have to add: and with a view to *glory*. For the Christian life is a life oriented towards beatitude.

In the remainder of his book Varden endeavours to:

... broaden a scope that has been scandalously narrowed, redrawing a Christian understanding of chastity based on the classical heritage we have considered, but reaching further. A Christian

view of chastity, if it is genuine, is not simplistic. It determinedly embraces the complex forms of our human condition no less than the divine fulfilment to which that nature is called.

In the second chapter, 'What human being is,' Vaden goes on to restate:

.... A view of human nature drawn from Scripture, in particular from the first three chapters of Genesis. The early Christians read this *protology*, the account of the world's beginning, with attention. The text speaks of man's making in the image and likeness of God. Some of the Fathers imagined this likeness as a robe of glory. The nakedness that suddenly bewildered Adam and Eve after the fall stood for the loss of this robe, for which the *protoplasts*, our first parents, tried to make amends by covering themselves with matter. The proverbial fig leaves, however, were strictly *pro tem*. At the end of Genesis 3, we are told that God, before expelling them from paradise, 'made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them' (Genesis 3:21). This is theology in images. In the sequence of clothing, undressing and re-clothing, the Fathers found a hermeneutic key to human experience. We might profitably try that key in some of our own rusted padlocks.

In the third chapter, 'Tensions,' Varden:

... considers the challenge of maturing to chastity through the prism of multiple tensions. Few find their way to integrity without a sense of being pulled in different directions. The experience may recur at different times of life in different ways. There can be joy in it. There can also be a sense of agonizing conflict. Who has not, at one time or another, stood aghast in front of the bathroom mirror forced to admit what Paul bravely confessed to the Romans, 'I do not understand my own actions. (Rom: 7:15)? We are often a riddle to ourselves.

Interior contradiction is treated squarely in Christian tradition, which helps us identify the balancing acts of which our lives consist. Chastity stands for equilibrium. It stands too for fearlessness as we find our homecoming to ourselves, which is what becoming chaste amounts to, is not so much an anxious manoeuvring between Scylla and Charybdis, menaces about us, as the progressive integration of possibilities within.

In the fourth chapter, 'Negotiating Passion,' Varden looks at:

.... the negotiation of passions from a monastic point of view. Why bother? Because monasticism was, from earliest times, a theological laboratory. While councils, ecumenical and partisan, argued and fought over points of doctrine, the Church's faith was put to the test in a parallel, experiential universe: that of the monasteries. The early monks and nuns were seekers after coherence. They wished to live in a way that realised their potential as men and women created in the image of the Word made flesh. This included the pursuit of chaste integrity. Endowed with self-knowledge, unafraid to call a spade a spade, these brothers and sisters of ours, though they lived long ago, provide insight to illumine and assist us still, floundering as we are in our post-postmodernity.

This chapter on the monastic quest culminates in an exposition of different ways of seeing. In fact, you will find that the motif of sight runs like a thread throughout the book. To inhabit the world chastely is to see it in truth and to see myself and humankind truthfully within it -that is to say, to become a contemplative. Contemplative life is often envisaged as near- disembodied, an existence of angelic aspiration or presumption. This is as ridiculous notion. The human being as such is contemplative. I submit that much perplexity regarding our nature springs from failure to acknowledge this dimension of who we are, all of us.

The fifth and final chapter, 'Contemplative life,' is a coda to the book exploring the idea of contemplation further, 'thinking it might usefully cast light from a different angle on the argument preceding it.'

Martin's Opinion:

Towards the end of his book Eric Varden writes: 'A Christian desires and is called to be fully alive, no less. But sometimes we need help to know what life is and where it is to be found. We need to be taught where we come from and where we are going, what means we have at our disposal, who is there to help us. This book is a modest attempt to provide a few indications.' By exploring the Christian understanding of the concept of chastity, Varden helpfully succeeds in achieving this goal. *Chastity* is a book which will be useful for any Christian seeking to understand afresh the classical Christian vision of what it means to live an integrated life as someone created by God in His image and likeness. Chastity is about being re-made by God in Christ so that we become the whole person God always intended us to be, a person who knows, and lives out, the truth about God and themselves. Varden's book is worth reading because it reminds us of this truth and what its implications are for the way we should live as Christians in today's world.

Commendations:

Dominic Walker declares:

'With Varden's background as a scholar and a monk, the reader is given new insights and fresh learning and encouragement. This is not light reading, but well worth the effort.'