

Latimer Trust

Monthly Reading List – July/August 2021

This is a summary of recent books read by Martin Davie, compiling his evaluations and the commendations of others. In this edition:

Part I – a review of five new books

Author	Title	Martin's opinion
Gerald Bray	<i>The History of Christianity in Britain and Ireland: From the First Century to the Twenty-First</i>	A one-volume history of Christianity in the British Isles from an orthodox Christian perspective. Well structured, comprehensive. Detailed and scholarly, suitable for the serious student. Highly recommended.
Alisa Childers	<i>Another Gospel?: A Lifelong Christian Seeks Truth in Response to Progressive Christianity</i>	Clear and persuasive account of progressive views of Christianity and why it lacks intellectual credibility. Popular apologetics at its best. Helpful for those who might fall (or have fallen) for claims of progressive Christianity – or those seeking to help them. Highly recommended.
Peter Kreeft	<i>How to destroy Western Civilization and other ideas from cultural abyss</i>	Book of 18 essays addressing the challenges facing Western Civilisation from a Christian perspective eg 'Traditionalism and Progressivism', 'Pity vs. Pacifism'. Evangelicals will disagree with some of what this Roman Catholic writer says, but he is well worth reading because he expresses the basic core of orthodox faith and morals so clearly, concisely, trenchantly and relevantly.
Michael Kruger	<i>Surviving Religion 101: Letters to a Christian Student on Keeping the Faith in College</i>	Addresses the challenges facing Christian young people going away to university and being confronted with challenges to the Bible and the Christian faith for the first time. Written as a series of letters from the author to his 18-year-old daughter. Easy to read, but also substantial and scholarly. Very helpful resource, not only for prospective students.
Andrew Walker	<i>Liberty for All: Defending Everyone's Religious Freedom in a Pluralistic Age</i>	Clear, thorough and scholarly defence of the principle of freedom of religion from a Christian standpoint. Argues that religious freedom is good for all, regardless of belief. Strongly recommended in order to understand and support the importance of freedom of religion for all.

Part II – a trilogy of books by Os Guinness

These three volumes are key texts for our present moment. They tell us why we are where we are, what we need to do in this situation, and why, in spite of everything, we can still have hope. Buy, read, lend, give away. Highly recommended.

Os Guinness	<i>The Gravedigger File</i> (1983)	Similar style to C.S. Lewis' <i>The Screwtape Letters</i> , this book consists of imaginary leaked memoranda from the Cold War spy era, analysing what has gone wrong with the Western Church. The memos reveal the Devil's long-term strategy for subverting the Church – to get the Church to the point where she is almost totally inseparable from her surrounding culture.
Os Guinness	<i>Renaissance</i> (2014)	Guinness considers positively how faithful Christians can meet the challenge of Christian renaissance in our day. For example, Guinness looks at the global tasks that face the Western church, the truths that Christians must remember, lessons from Church history. Each chapter has a prayer and discussion questions.
Os Guinness	<i>Impossible People</i> (2017)	Guinness looks further at what it means to live as faithful Christians in the modern world. He argues that we need to be like medieval saint Peter Damian who was willing to be 'faithful to Jesus alone and above all' and explores what that looks like for Christians – for example, the challenges facing Western Christians, the reality of spiritual warfare, engagement with atheists. Prayer and discussion questions after each chapter.

M B Davie
July 2021

Gerald Bray, *The History of Christianity in Britain and Ireland: From the First Century to the Twenty-First*, Apollos (2021), ISBN 9781789741209, £39.99 (e-edition also available)

Overview:

Gerald Bray is Research Professor of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School in the United States and Director of Research for the Latimer Trust. He is the author of numerous well-regarded books on doctrine and church history, and his new book is a history of Christianity in the British Isles from the first beginnings of Christianity in Roman Britain to the present day.

As Bray explains in his Preface, writing a one-volume history of Christianity in these islands is a 'daunting task', but it is 'also an increasingly necessary one.' The reason it is necessary is because:

No factor has been more influential in shaping the destiny of the peoples of Britain and Ireland than the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the history of these islands cannot be understood apart from it. At the same time, this unifying force has revealed itself in great diversity, contributing much to the distinctive identities of the nations that inhabit the North Atlantic archipelago and the divisions within them. The development of British and Irish Christianities contains many different stories that both converge and diverge from one another. Historians have done much to explain the details of how the church has evolved in the separate nations of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, but a synthesis of the whole has rarely been attempted yet the evolution of one nation cannot be understood properly without involving the others, and some attempt must be made to situate individual narratives in an overarching framework. This is what the present book attempts to do.

Bray further explains that his book is written from 'the standpoint of Christian faith' and thus in the light of the belief that 'the events of the past, present and future will one day be judged by the justice and mercy of the eternal God.' In his view it is 'beyond dispute' that 'the present time is one of trial for Christians and Christianity in the British Isles.' As he sees it:

The smug complacency of the Victorian era has gone beyond recall, and the immediate future is not encouraging. The UK is in greater danger of falling apart than it has ever been and the secular belief that peace and harmony will flow from shared material prosperity and religious indifference has been shown to be hollow. It is certainly true but at one level the peoples of the British Isles have become virtually one and, apart from local accents and folklore, the inhabitants of Cork, Aberdeen, Swansea and Cheltenham now share a common culture and mental outlook. But this homogenization has produced a countervailing tendency that emphasizes 'the narcissism of petty differences,' which threatens to sow division and bitterness among those who are fundamentally alike. In that climate a reminder that what we have in common is far more important than what separates us is more necessary than ever, and our Christian heritage provides us with a foundation for doing this that nothing else does. If this book can help us to understand who we are, where we have been, and where we may be going, it will have served its purpose. Of course, our faith is bigger than the British Isles – it embraces the whole of Europe and stretches across the entire world. But within that bigger picture the peoples of Britain and Ireland constituted a definable and distinguished unit. For better or worse, it has bequeathed to us a legacy that is our responsibility to embrace and hand onto generations yet unborn, until that day when our Lord will come again in glory. It is to encourage both an understanding of that inheritance and an acceptance of it that this book has been written.

Martin's opinion:

Bray's history of British and Irish Christianity is well structured, comprehensive in its scope, draws on the most recent scholarship concerning the topics it covers, and, as the Preface makes clear, is written from an orthodox Christian perspective. Because of its length and scholarly nature, it is not a volume one would necessarily recommend to someone just starting their study of Church history, but for the serious student with some existing historical knowledge it now constitutes the 'go to' resource for anyone wanting to understand the history of Christianity in the British Isles. Highly recommended.

Alisa Childers, Another Gospel? A Lifelong Christian Seeks Truth in Response to Progressive Christianity, Tyndale House (2020), ISBN 9781496441737, £13.50 (e- and audio editions also available)

Overview:

Alisa Childers is an American singer, podcaster and writer. She was brought up as an orthodox Christian, but then encountered a liberal ('progressive') Pastor who picked apart all that she believed about God, Jesus and the Bible. In her words:

We've all heard stories all Christian kids who walk away from their faith after being challenged by sceptical professors in a college classroom. My faith was confronted in a similar way... but not at a university. It was challenged in the pews of a church. It was rocked by a pastor who had won my trust, respect, and loyalty. This wasn't some random weirdo I'd met during a street outreach on Hollywood Boulevard who spouted vitriol against God as I handed him a gospel tract. This was an educated, intellectual, calm, and eloquent church leader – someone who expressed love for Jesus. He was a brilliant communicator, and he had a bone to pick with Christianity.

Meeting after meeting, every precious belief I held about God, Jesus, and the Bible was placed on unintellectual chopping block and hacked to pieces. Identifying himself as a 'hopeful agnostic,' this pastor began examining the tenets of the faith. The Virgin birth? Doesn't matter. The Resurrection? Probably happened, but you don't have to believe in it. The Atonement? That would be a nope. And the Bible? God forbid you believed scripture was inerrant. He pointed out that even the high schoolers had moved beyond that primitive notion. During our discussions, many in the class dismissed 'fundies' (fundamentalists) as fearful dimwits who simply followed what they were told to believe.

As a result of her encounter with this pastor, she writes, I was thrust into a spiritual blackout – a foray into darkness like I'd never known.' She cried out to God for help and he eventually led her back to orthodox faith.

The progressive wave that slammed me against the Rock of Ages had broken apart my deeply ingrained assumptions about Jesus, God and the Bible. But that same Rock of Ages slowly but surely began to re-arrange the pieces, discarding a few and putting the right ones back where they belonged.

What she discovered in the process was that:

...the core historic claims of Christianity are true. I've learned that the Bible, though attacked and maligned century after century, stands tall atop the rubble of accusations that have been piled up against it. I've come to know that the Christian worldview is the only one that can sufficiently explain reality. I've rediscovered Jesus... the confounding preacher from Nazareth we split history into and you kept his word to never leave me. As you follow me on this journey, I pray your faith will be strengthened too.

I'm more convinced than ever that Christianity is not based on a mystical revelation or self-imposed philosophy. It's deeply rooted in history. In fact, it is the only religious system I can think of that depends on a historical event (the resurrection of Jesus) being real – not fake – news.

Her book is her account of her spiritual and intellectual journey and what she learned in the course of it. It begins by describing her story, and it then goes on to look at how the existence of the orthodox Christian faith can be traced right back to the earliest days of the Church, the reasons why people embrace a progressive view of the Christian faith instead of an orthodox one, why progressive Christianity is simply a re-

working of ancient heresies, and why we can believe in the reliability of the biblical text, the historical accuracy of the Gospels, the authority of the Bible as God's inspired word, the existence of hell, and Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Her conclusion is that:

We don't get to completely redefine who God is and how he works in the world and call it Christian. We don't get to make the rules and do what is right in our own eyes and yet claim to be followers of Jesus. Our only option is to do it his way or not at all. His name is truth. His gospel is bloody. His way is beautiful. For God so loved the world.

Martin's opinion:

This book gives a clear and persuasive account of what the progressive view of Christianity espoused by writers such as Brian McLaren, Richard Rohr and Steve Chalke involves and why this account of the Christian faith lacks intellectual credibility. It is an example of popular apologetics at its best, in that it draws on first class scholarship but expresses its findings in a way that those who are not scholars will be able to understand. It is a book that should be read by anyone who wants to know the difference between progressive and orthodox Christianity and why the latter is the truth. It is also a book to give to those who are in danger of falling for the claims of progressive Christianity or seeking to find their way home from it. It is a book that ministers should read and lend or give away and that needs to be on church bookshelves.

Commendations:

Melissa Kruger has written:

'Is it possible to reconstruct faith after deconstruction? Using her own season of spiritual doubt as a backdrop, Alisa Childers explores the validity of Christianity – as well as the ineffectiveness of progressive Christianity – with precision, insight and intellectual integrity. *Another Gospel?* is a needed and welcome book that reveals the ways historic Christianity can stand up to our doubts, concerns and questions.'

Peter Kreeft, *How to destroy Western Civilization and other ideas from cultural abyss* Ignatius Press (2021), ISBN 9781621642688, £14.33 (e-edition and audio editions also available)

Overview:

Peter Kreeft, who is Professor of Philosophy at Boston College in the United States, is a highly respected and widely read Roman Catholic writer whose many bestselling books cover a vast array of topics in spirituality, theology and philosophy.

His new book is a collection of eighteen essays addressing the challenges facing Western Civilisation from a Christian perspective. The topics covered by these essays include 'Traditionalism and Progressivism', 'C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and the culture wars' and 'Pity vs. Pacifism'. It is not possible to summarise all eighteen essays in the length of this review – but extracts from three of them will serve to give a flavour of the whole.

In his title essay, 'How to Destroy Western Civilization', Kreeft declares:

The single most necessary thing we can possibly do to save our civilization – the single most necessary thing citizens can ever do to save their civilization at all times and all places and in all cultures, whether they are good or evil, religious or irreligious, ancient or modern – is to have children.

If you don't have children, your civilization will cease to exist. Before you can be good or evil, religious or irreligious, you must exist.

Having children is thus the most rational thing we can do. It is also the most trans-rational thing we can do. I remember hearing someone say once that 'Having fits is more rational than having children.' They were quite right! But the conclusion they thought followed from that ('So don't have children') did not follow. Having fits is more rational than falling in love too. And having fits is more rational than being a saint (which is falling in love with God), being a martyr, or even being a hero.

Having children is the most heroic thing we can do because nothing changes your life more than having children. Martyrdom is easy; it's over quickly. Children are never over. Never. Not even if they die before you.

Children are the masters; parents are the servants. The parents' life, their time, their lifetime, their money, their attention, *everything*, changes and orbits like a planet around the sun of their children's needs. Having children is the single most generous, charitable, loving, unselfish, saintly Christian act that a society can perform for itself.

it is the act of self-giving, and the first thing that parents give is the first thing the parents have; existence. It is very obvious, but easily forgotten, that no subsequent gifts – love, education, support, attention – can be given if that first gift (existence) is denied, or if that gift is taken away after it is given, by murdering the children that already exist. (One third of all children conceived in American and Canada are aborted; I think our ancestors would literally not be able to believe that fact.)

In his essay 'What can Chicken Little do?', Kreeft asks, 'What can you do when you see the sky falling, when you see your culture swirling like garbage down the drain?' His answer is that you can 'preserve and remember' what he calls 'foundational, fundamental facts of common sense.' He gives forty facts, such as:

'We know that almost certain knowledge is divine revelation, since God alone can neither deceive nor be deceived.'

‘God is sovereign. He’s got the whole world in his hands. His providence is mysterious but real. History is his story. We, too, write the story, but only as characters in his story, not independent of it.’

‘This world and this life are precious, but Man’s ultimate good, end, purpose, and happiness are eternal, not temporal. Ephemeral civilizations are to immortal souls what fleas are to galaxies. Those who seek first the kingdom of this world lose not only the kingdom of God but this world as well. That is what C.S. Lewis sagely calls the principle of first and second things.’

‘A nation that does not know the meaning of life, has no substantive philosophy, has no wisdom and no real authority to decide anything, like for example, whether a city’s budget should fund a new library or a new casino.’

‘The enemy within is far worse than the enemy without. Islamic terrorists can only kill a few bodies; our home-grown apostates and immoralists can kill our souls.’

In his essay ‘The Unmentionable Elephant in the Living Room of the Religious Liberty Debate’ he writes: ‘It’s the unmentionable elephant in the living room. It’s sex. Religious liberty is being attacked in the name of sexual liberty.’ He goes on to write:

If Jews and Christians could just erase two of the commandments, the ones against adultery and lust, the new post-Christian culture of western civilization would have absolutely no problem with religion.

They call us ‘judgmental and authoritarian,’ but it’s because we’re exactly the opposite because we do *not* claim the authority to contradict our Creator and Commander, because we dare not be so judgmental as to judge His judgments to be mistaken because we dare not erase or change the line he has drawn in the sand. We cannot compromise our consciences because we believe our consciences are His prophets not society’s.

It’s not that we seek to impose our sexual morality (or any other part of morality) on others by force. We propose; we do not impose. We seek only liberty of conscience for everyone, including ourselves. No one wants to send sexual stormtroopers into fornicator’s bedrooms.

But they seek to impose their sexual morality on us they do not merely propose, they impose. They want to force ours to compromise our consciences or be punished by a fine (or something worse). Why? We can tolerate them, why can’t they tolerate us? Why are they so threatened by our minority view?

Martin’s opinion:

Kreeft is a Roman Catholic writer and therefore Evangelicals will disagree with some parts of what he says. But as in the case with that other Catholic writer whom he very much resembles, G.K. Chesterton, most of what Kreeft writes expresses what C.S. Lewis called ‘Mere Christianity’, the basic core of orthodox faith and morals to which all orthodox Christians have adhered since New Testament times. Kreeft is well worth reading because he expresses this basic core clearly, concisely and trenchantly, and because he shows how it relates to the key issues facing Western civilisation today. He is someone from whom Evangelicals can learn in this regard, whatever their differences with him on other matters.

Commendations:

Robert Reilly comments: 'A pithy, often very funny book, with a serious underlying purpose. Peter Kreeft, our very own C. S. Lewis, is a keen diagnostician of our moral and spiritual disorders – here set forth in layman's language of common sense. He doesn't flinch or coddle. Truth is hard on those who deny it. Whether it makes you laugh or cry, this is a book to be savoured and enjoyed on many levels.'

Michael Kruger, *Surviving Religion 101: Letters to a Christian Student on Keeping the Faith in College*, Crossway Books (2021), ISBN 9781433572074, £13.50 (e edition also available)

Overview:

Michael Kruger is the President Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina, in the United States where is also New Testament and Early Christianity. His main area of scholarly expertise is the origins and development of New Testament canon, and he has published a number of books and articles on this topic. His new book, however, looks at a different issue: the challenges facing Christian young people who are going away to university (what the Americans also refer to as 'college'), and who are confronted with challenges to the Bible and the Christian faith for the first time.

As Kruger explains in his introduction:

Confronted by an intellectual world for which they are not prepared, Christian college students are leaving behind their faith in worrying numbers. And Christian parents feel this tension acutely. Having laboured to raise their children in a Christian environment and with Christian beliefs – often with great financial cost – those same children often return, after only a single year of college, with very different beliefs from what they held when they left.

This being the case:

Christians need to think more seriously about how to prepare the next generation of believers to handle the intellectual challenges of the university environment (and beyond). We need to do more than prepare them morally and practically; we need to train their minds to engage effectively with an unbelieving world.

So how's that going to happen? Ultimately, it will require a macroshift in the broader evangelical world, moving beyond just pietism and revivalism and recapturing the deep historical and intellectual roots of the Christian faith. And then, that same evangelical world must think carefully and critically about how we pass that robust version of the faith to the next generation. Admittedly, that sounds like an overwhelming challenge. But we can take baby steps in that direction. This book is designed to be one of those baby steps.

While there are already numerous books that offer practical guidance and advice to Christian college students, very few directly engage the intellectual minefield they face. Today's college students need more than dating advice and tips on how to make good grades. They need a framework for dealing with the flood – no, tsunami – of intellectual attacks they will receive from their professors, classmates, and campus organizations. Sure, Christians outside college face similar challenges from our culture. But the intensity and concentration of these challenges in a university environment is unmatched. And college students are dealing with these immense pressures at a relatively young age. That's why the intellectual preparation of Christian students for college must be a priority.

This present volume is designed to help in that preparation by tackling not only the key issues in biblical scholarship but also the flashpoints of our cultural conversations in a manner that is accessible to college students (and, hopefully, even seniors in high school). My desire is that *Surviving Religion 101* provides an intellectual pathway for Christian students so that they can keep their faith without sacrificing their intellectual integrity.

This is a subject which has been on his mind for some time, but what prompted him to finally produce a book about it was his oldest daughter, Emma, going off to college for the first time. The book is structured as a series of fifteen letters to her, each one addressing a different question Kruger knows she will face.

Thus, chapter 1 is a letter addressing the question, 'I'm worried about being a Christian at a secular university – How will I survive?' In the course of this letter Kruger tackles the issue of how a Christian can retain confidence in their faith when they don't know all the answers to the questions that they are asked about it. His advice to his daughter is as follows:

Whatever the question might be, it can be very uncomfortable not having an answer. The intellectual give-and-take of a big university environment can be intimidating. If you get caught on the losing end of an exchange with your professor or classmates (whatever that may mean), you might feel silly or embarrassed. It might make you withdraw from future conversations or even lead you to doubt what you believe. But should your lack of answers lead to this sort of reaction? Not at all. First, you need to give yourself a break. Most eighteen-year-old Christians are not fully equipped to answer the barrage of complex (and aggressive) questions coming their way, nor is it reasonable to expect them to be. What first year student is able to go toe-to-toe with a professor? Of course you won't have answers to every question! Why would you ever think you should or could? Don't hold yourself to an unrealistic standard.

Second, not having an answer does not affect the truth of what you believe. Your beliefs can be absolutely correct, even if you cannot explain or defend them. Consider other beliefs you might hold. If asked whether you believe humans landed on the moon in 1969, I imagine you would say you do. But if you happened to strike up a conversation with a moon-landing denier (these folks are more common than you think) who shared all his well-crafted objections and pressed you to defend your beliefs, you would probably have very few answers. But surely you wouldn't abandon that belief just because you were stumped. Your belief would still be correct.

The fact is that most things we believe are like this. We haven't had time to personally investigate each and every belief we hold – instead, we rely on other authorities. A person might believe that $E=mc^2$, that Constantine won the Battle of Milvian Bridge, and that her grandfather was born in George, Iowa. But few could defend these beliefs on the spot if pressed by a determined critic who was eager to question everything.

Third, don't confuse not having an answer with there not being an answer. The two are not the same. Even if you don't have answers to difficult questions, that does not mean there are none. Indeed, you should know that most of the objections you will hear are old news (even though they are often presented as if no one had ever thought of them before). A little research will show that Christians have been wrestling with these issues – and offering coherent answers to these issues – for generations. In fact, some of these objections were answered in the first few centuries of the early Christian movement. Moreover, there are many Christian scholars out there who have provided comprehensive answers to these questions (though secular professors often refuse to discuss those arguments).

Here's the big point: you're not going to be able to answer every objection to Christianity that you hear. And that's okay. You just need to be ready for that. It's not a reason to doubt your faith.

Among the other questions addressed in the book are 'There Are a Lot of Different Views Here – How Can We Say That Christianity Is the Only Right Religion?', 'I Have Gay Friends Who Are Kind, Wonderful, and Happy – Are We Sure That Homosexuality Is Really Wrong?', and 'Everything I Believe Seems to Hinge on the Truth of the Bible – How Do We Know It's Really from God?'

Martin's opinion:

This book comes into the category of popular but substantial. On the one hand its epistolary format makes it easy to read and it is not burdened with quotations, footnotes or technical theological jargon. On the other

hand it is based on reliable up to date scholarship and it gives serious answers to serious questions. It will be a very helpful book not only for young Christians going off to university (who will face the same questions in this country as they do in the United States), but also for all Christians who want answers to the challenges to Christian faith posed by society at large, and for serious enquirers who want to know if the Christian faith is believable in the light of these challenges. It is a book for Christians to buy for themselves and then lend or give away to others and it would make a good basis for a sermon series or a series of home group sessions. A very helpful resource.

Commendations:

Rosaria Butterfield writes:

'Surviving Religion 101 is a crucial book for all Christians to read because the world that we inhabit has become the university culture of Michael Kruger's twenties. An epistolary book composed of letters from a loving Christian father to a faithful daughter entering the university, it invites us to ask crucial questions that help us make our calling and election sure. Are we intellectually prepared to understand and respond to the non-Christian thinking that surrounds us? If we believe that personal conversion and personal piety are enough for the Christian college student to survive, we are dangerously wrong. Our lack of intellectual preparation may explain why so many faithful Christians have had their faith shipwrecked by so-called progressive Christianity, living now with cultural change and social activism as proof of holiness. And for this reason, this book is as necessary for students entering Christian colleges as it is for those entering secular ones. Thanks be to God for this book. May it be used by God to preserve the faith of our college students and bring their unbelieving professors into the kingdom of God.'

Andrew Walker, *Liberty for All: Defending Everyone's Religious Freedom in a Pluralistic Age*, Brazos Press, ISBN 9781587435331, £28.80 (paperback, e- and audio editions also available)

Overview:

Those who know their church history will be aware that Baptists have been staunch supporters of freedom of religion since the seventeenth century. In this new book, the American Southern Baptist theologian Andrew Walker offers a renewed argument for universal religious freedom in the context of the current debate about the issue in the United States where many Christians feel that religious liberty is now under threat from a growing secular totalitarianism.

As he explains in his Introduction, Walker's starting point is the conviction that:

We Christians should extend religious liberty to everyone, because everyone is pursuing truth, even if incorrectly. In a secular and increasingly pluralistic age, we need to allow falsehood a space to be wrong in hopes that individuals will 'come to the knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim. 2:4). This does not mean we refrain from naming moral wrongs or fall captive to empty-headed relativism. It means we do not seek to criminalize, persecute, or marginalize people whose beliefs are sincere and are animating them toward lives of purpose, meaning, and goodwill (and there are checks and balances to consider when convictions pose risks and harms to civil society). This is not a world where limits and authority are cast off; instead, within properly understood limits, people are allowed to act in accordance with what they believe is choice-worthy and will produce flourishing.

As Walker further explains:

Liberty for All offers a public theology of religious liberty. Religious liberty, tragically, is now a casualty of culture wars in the West. I will talk some about cultural challenges toward the end of the book, but that is not what this book is primarily about. Rather, this book is about acknowledging a few essential truths: (1) because humanity is made in God's image, each human is religious and truth-seeking in nature, regardless of whether they understand themselves as 'religious'; (2) we live in a pluralistic era, and the biblical story line expects religious difference to occur in this temporary 'secular' age (I will explain what 'secular' means later); (3) religious liberty and freedom of conscience promote human and societal flourishing; (4) the Bible does not command any formal, institutional union between a religious body and government; and (5) Christianity is the best arbiter for religious liberty because it has theological resources to help us grapple with some of the most difficult societal challenges. To make this argument, I will show why eschatology (the kingdom of God), anthropology (the image of God), and missiology (the mission of God) all point toward a public theology of religious liberty. An underlying point of this book is to explain why an idea like religious liberty is intelligible and choice-worthy for a society to organize itself around.

Martin's opinion:

This book is a clear, thorough and scholarly defence of the principle of freedom of religion from a Christian standpoint. It cogently argues that freedom of religion is a necessary consequence of Christian theology rightly understood and that a religiously free society is good not only for Christians, but also for those of other religions and those with no religion at all. It is an aspect of the *common* good. This book can be strongly recommended for anyone who seeks to understand why Christians must support freedom of religion, not just for themselves, but for everyone else as well and who wants the resources to argue this case in the public square.

Commendations:

Rod Dreher declares:

‘In a time when the term ‘religious liberty’ has become a byword for bigotry among some, Walker pushes back against this narrow-minded prejudice and argues for why honouring and defending freedom of religious conscience is essential to the public good. This book appears as a lighthouse in a gathering storm.’

PART II – A trilogy of books by Os Guinness

As the reviews above all indicate, we live in a time of acute challenge for the Church in the Western world in the face of an increasingly secular culture and the sexual revolution that has accompanied it.

A trilogy of books by the veteran Christian apologist and theologian Os Guinness provide a set of helpful tools for understanding the nature of this challenge and how Christians should respond to it.

Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger File*, Hodder & Stoughton (1983), ISBN 9780340324691

The first of these books is *The Gravedigger File* which was published by Hodder and Stoughton in 1983 and is available second-hand. This book gives an analysis of what has gone wrong with the Western Church and why, nonetheless, there is still hope.

This book borrows the idea of documents revealing demonic strategy from C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters* but whereas Lewis' book is about demonic attack on an individual Christian, *The Gravedigger File* is about the demonic attack on the Church as a whole.

Drawing on the imagery of Cold War spy fiction, *The Gravedigger File* takes the form of series of imaginary leaked memoranda which reveal the long-term demonic strategy for the subversion of the Church, 'Operation Gravedigger'.

Guinness' basic argument is that the way the Church has been subverted and brought to the point of near collapse is by a demonic identification of the Church with Western culture. God has commanded Christians to be faithful to him by living lives that are involved in the world but not dominated by its ideas and values. The Devil, by contrast, has sought to subvert the Church by bringing about a near total identification of the Church with Western culture and by so doing bring the Church to a point where, in a supreme irony, God himself must judge it for its unfaithfulness.

As the opening memorandum puts it (using the term 'Adversary' to describe God from a demonic perspective):

The Church contributed to the creation of the modern world. Soon she was committed to that world without reservation. Before long she was hopelessly contaminated – in the world and up to her neck.

We have moved easily through the standard levels of version, each level leaving the Church deeper in cultural captivity. First, we encourage the complete identification of the Church with culture so that she couldn't see where one ended and the other began. This is the *culture-blind* level, the level at which we have neutralised her integrity.

Second, we develop this identification of Church and culture to the point where she had no strength to act independently. This is the *culture-bound* level, the level at which we have neutralised her effectiveness either to do anything distinctively different from the culture or indeed to be seen as different by others.

Now we're approaching the *culture-burned* level. This is the level at which it becomes apparent (too late!) But through her uncritical identification with culture, the church is being badly burned and must live with the consequences. Our supreme prize at this level is the complete devastation of the church by getting the Adversary to judge her himself.

...Here, in a stroke, is the beauty of subversion through worldliness and its infinite superior onto the persecution if the Adversary is to judge his own people, who are we to complain?

This description of what the Devil is seeking to do to the Church makes absolute sense if one looks at the issue of human sexuality. Because the Church in the West has for so long been identified with Western

culture, when, as a result of the sexual revolution, the culture has moved to an ungodly view of human sexual identity and behaviour, Christian after Christian and church after church have come to adopt the same view and thus brought themselves under the judgement of God.

The book goes on to argue in later memoranda that both conservative and liberal Christians have been undergone the same process, but in different ways, both becoming assimilated to the surrounding culture, but in different ways. The difference is that liberals knowingly choose to identify with changing culture while conservatives assimilate with the culture while being blind to the fact that this is what they are doing. Because conservative Christians lack cultural awareness they all too often go with the cultural flow without even being aware of it, and lack the ability to mount a serious challenge to modern cultural developments.

At the end of the memoranda there is an afterword which explains why the defector who allegedly leaked the memoranda came to believe that the end of the Church was not so certain as the memoranda suggest.

First, it says, for Christians:

...the challenge of the present facts alone is neither harder nor easier for us than it was for the earliest believers who had to say yes to Christ and no to Caesar. What matters is faith, the stance from which the discrepancy is seen, from which the facts are best assessed and from which action most effectively precedes. God, after all, is sovereign over the wider picture and not just over our own small part.

Secondly:

There is every reason to believe that the major alternatives to the gospel are in worse condition than the Church. In the case of secularism, for example, the plainest fact about the secular world is its disillusionment with secularism. Heralded so recently as progressive and irreversible, secularism (the philosophy) has failed conspicuously to consolidate the advantages offered to it by secularisation (the process). There are more atheistic and non-religious people in the world than ever before, as the papers attest, but there is a ferment of new spiritual movements which grows straight from the heart of their problems with secularism.

People in the secular world have too much to live with, too little to live for. Once growth and prosperity ceased to be their reasons for existence, they ask questions about the purpose and meaning of their lives: Whence? Whither? Why? To such questions secularism has no answer, or – more accurately – the answers it as given have not satisfied in practice. Secularism in its sophisticated humanist form is too erudite at times, too banal at others; it flourishes only in intellectual centres. In its repressive Marxist form, it creaks.

Thirdly:

The Western Church is not the whole Church. It is only the older Church, a Church which handed on its torch just as it was taken captive by the world it helped to create. But what if that torch were handed back to the old Church by the new, burning more brightly than when it was given? The challenge of modernity would still have to be faced, but with all the lessons of our experience and all the life of theirs.

Fourthly:

Even if the modern world proved to be the greatest challenge the Church has faced, or if all the alternative to the gospel were powerful and menacing rather than weak, or if the Church in the rest of the world were non-existent or as weak as we are, the faith would still endure. Its currency is truth its source is unconquerable kingdom.

The Christian Church may be in poor shape in the modern world, but this is not the first time, nor is it likely to be the last.

...Like an eternal jack-in-the- box, Christian truth will always spring back. No power on earth can finally keep it down, not even the power of Babylonian confusion and captivity. 'At least five times,' noted G.K. Chesterton, 'the Faith has to all appearances gone to the dogs. In each of these five cases it was the dog that died.'

To write these things is not to whistle in the dark. Nor to dredge up arguments to bolster the defences of a sagging optimism. Rather, since the *Gravedigger* thesis turned on the monumental irony with which the papers began, it is apt to finish with another: there is no one like the other side for overplaying their hand.

...Out of corruption came reformation. This was the story of their sixteenth-century overbalance. But what of an earlier day still, a day when they planned another grave and held another body captive? That day witnessed the greatest irony of all. It was, as John Donne saw, the day death died. Because, as Augustine had seen before him, 'The cross of the Lord was the devil's mouse trap.'

Grave digging has been a somewhat less than certain business ever since.

Os Guinness, Renaissance, IVP (2014), ISBN 9780830836710

If the *Gravedigger File* analyses what has gone wrong with the Western Church, in *Renaissance*, which was published by IVP in 2014, Guinness moves on to consider positively how faithful Christians can meet the challenge of working for a Christian renaissance in our day.

In the opening chapter of the book, 'Our Augustinian Moment', Guinness notes that Augustine lived at the time of the fall of the Roman Empire in the West, and that:

Augustine's privilege and his challenge was to trust God and live faithfully at such a time of turmoil, breakdown and distress, and to articulate a vision of the Kingdom of God that could form a pathway to cross the dark ages between the collapse of Rome in the West and the centuries later rise of Christendom.

In our own time of turmoil, argues Guinness, Christians in the 'advanced modern world' face a similar challenge: We are in a 'moment of transition to a post-Christian West' and in the face of this reality the common challenge facing orthodox Christians, whatever their particular denominational allegiance is to:

...trust in God and his gospel and move out confidently into the world, living and working for a new Christian renaissance, and thus challenging the darkness with the hope of Christian faith, believing in an outcome that lies beyond the horizon of all we can see and accomplish today.

In the second chapter, 'Grand Global Tasks', Guinness notes that 'the Christian faith has risen to be the world's first truly global religion' and goes on to consider 'three major tasks the global church must undertake over the course of the twenty-first century'.

The first task is 'to help prepare the Global South for the challenges that are coming along with the forces of development and modernization' so that it can avoid the errors of worldliness and cultural captivity that have devastated the Church in the West. The second 'is to help win back the Western world to Jesus.' This means that 'we Western Christians, helped undoubtedly by our fellow Christians from across the world, must turn from the prevailing gloom and doom and set about the glorious task of winning back our societies and nations for our Lord.' The third is to 'contribute constructively to the human future.' Standing on the shoulders of previous generations of Christian social reformers, Christians today 'must tackle the even

greater issues of the global era that otherwise threaten to call into question the very future of humanity and the planet itself.'

In the third chapter, 'Unnecessary, Unlikely, Undeniable', Guinness argues that the Christian faith is not necessary for the existence of civilisation (civilisations have existed without any Christian influence) and at first sight it seems unlikely that the carpenter from Nazareth and his band of followers could shape a new civilisation in the West. However, it is also undeniable that this has happened and that we owe five 'distinctive features' of Western civilisation to the Christian faith. These are 'a strong tradition of philanthropy that has created a culture of giving and caring,' a 'tradition of recurring reform movements that has no parallel in other civilizations', the existence of the university system, the existence of modern science, and the Western championing 'of human dignity, human rights and the entire human rights revolution.'

What all this shows is that Christianity has had cultural power and in chapter four, 'The Secret of Cultural Power', Guinness goes on to look at how key aspects of the Christian worldview have shaped Western culture. First, the Christian faith affirms the goodness of the natural order, while also teaching the importance of self-denial and self-discipline in the face of sin and the hope of another world beyond this one. 'It delights in the this-worldly without being worldly.' Secondly, the Christian faith involves both realism about human fallibility, and the 'open and voluntary confession of our wrongs', and it does so because it has a transcendent source of authority and self-criticism 'the Word of God – powerful, objective and standing above the flux and flow of history and human culture.' Thirdly, the Christian attitude to the wider world has been marked by three factors 'committed engagement, cultural discernment and courageous refusal' that have combined 'to generate the creative tension with the world that becomes culture-shaping.'

For Guinness, what history shows us is that:

When we truly live in the world but are not of it, when we are completely engaged in it, but never completely equated with it, we can achieve a critical tension with the world that is born of faithfulness, discernment and refusal. When the Church of Jesus lives like that, she becomes – under God – the greatest transforming agency the world has ever seen.

In Chapter five, 'The Dynamics of the Kingdom', Guinness declares that as Christians we must affirm both the sovereignty of God and the significance of human action (as shown by the story of shipwreck of Paul off Malta in Acts 27). This means that while 'God is sovereign and his kingdom advances in its own ways', we have our own part to play and in playing our part we need to learn from modern scholarship about 'how ideas influence society and how the world is changed.'

Three key lessons in this regard, says Guinness, are 'that the ideas of leaders always outweigh the ideas of followers', that 'ideas are more powerful when they are exerted at the centre of society rather than the periphery' and that 'ideas spread best through networks rather than through individuals or institutions'.

We need to take these principles on board while also taking note of the distinctive Christian insights that 'it is the Spirit of God who leads the advance of the kingdom of God', that God reverses our expectations by working in unlikely ways and through unlikely people, and that the creation of a culture is a by-product not a goal. The goal is seeking God's kingdom and his righteousness, the by-product is shaping culture: 'the kingdom of God is our goal, in all its fully orb'd richness throughout our daily lives. All the rest is the added value that, by God's grace, comes with it.'

In chapter 6, 'Our Golden Age is Ahead', Guinness explains that the three great failures of the Church in the past, illustrated by the Reformation, have been 'secularization, corruption and division'. These failures still threaten the Church today and mean that 'the Reformation principle of the need for constant, ongoing reformation is as vital as ever.' In addition, the failures of the Church in history also point us to the basic

truth that 'there is no golden age behind us. Our golden age lies ahead – when, and only when, our Lord returns.'

Guinness then notes three further lessons from Church history. First, 'that times of the greatest success often carry the seeds of the greatest failure.' Secondly, that 'the darkest hour is truly just before dawn' – 'the story and lesson of every revival.' Thirdly, 'the church always goes forward best by going back first' – not going back to some mythical golden age of church history, but to 'Jesus himself – his character, his teaching, his commands and his endorsement of the authority of Scripture for his followers.' The key lesson we need to learn is that 'in this generation as in every generation, we all often go wrong, and it is always time to go back to him in order to go forward and on with God.'

In a 'Concluding Postscript', Guinness reminds his readers that only God knows whether the sort of active obedience to God he has been calling for will 'lead to an astonishing spiritual renaissance', or whether the next generation of the Church will 'have to remain faithful through a new dark age, or through times that are something in between.'

He concludes:

We wait for God's answer, but as we wait, we work. We may be in the dark about our times, but we are not in the dark about God. Whatever the future holds, we are walking in the light with our Lord, so followers of Jesus must have the courage and the faith to work for a new renaissance in our time. So let there be no fear, nor alarmism, nor despondency, nor nostalgia. Instead, let us look up and so act with faith as to say with our prayers as with our lives, 'Let a thousand flowers bloom! And then let us care nothing for any fashionable talk of legacy, but leave the outcome of our enterprise to God and to history.'

And as ever, *non nobis*. 'Not to us, O Lord. Not to us, but to Your name give glory.'

Each chapter of the book concludes with a prayer and series of questions for discussion. At the end of the book, Guinness sets out an 'Evangelical Manifesto' containing a declaration of Evangelical identity and principles for Evangelical involvement in public life.

Os Guinness, *Impossible People*, IVP (2017), ISBN 9780830844654

In *Impossible People*, published by IVP in 2017 and written as a companion to *Renaissance*, Guinness looks further at what it means to live as faithful Christians in the modern world.

In the Introduction, *Found Faithful*, Guinness sketches out the challenges facing the Church today and contends that in order to face them, we need to be like Peter Damian, the medieval saint who was called 'the impossible man' for his willingness to be 'faithful to Jesus alone and above all.' As Guinness puts it at the end of the chapter:

The Church of Jesus can never be the church without both faith and faithfulness, and both of them in a form that is strong to the point of being stubborn. The supreme challenge of the hour for the Church of Jesus in the advanced modern world is to so live and speak as witnesses to our Lord that, as in the motto of the US Marines, we are *Semper Fi* – Always Found Faithful. Rarely in two thousand years of Christian history has that calling been so tested as it is in our time. can threats of death or seductive temptations to an easy life, our task is to stand faithful to our Lord in every moment of our lives and faithful to our last breath.

In chapter one, 'New World, Old Challenges', Guinness argues that the contemporary West is a 'cut flower civilization' that has lost its roots and so will eventually die. This is due to the convergence of three trends.

First: 'there has been a direct repudiation of the one powerful Jewish and Christian beliefs that formed the foundations of the Western world and its key ideas and ideals.'

Secondly, 'there has been a subtle shift in the meaning of many Western ideas, so that once-strong Jewish and Christian terms are now used in different ways that decisively change their meaning and sustainability.'

Thirdly, 'the attempt to sustain the Jewish and Christian ideas and ideals by directly transposing them into a secular key can increasingly be seen as a failure.'

At the same time, the world is going through a series of 'grand global transformations'. First there is a shift from the 'age of pyrotechnology,' based on the engineering of fire, to the 'age of biotechnology' based on the engineering of life. Secondly, there is a shift from the 'industrial age' to the 'information age' leading to ever increasing globalisation. Thirdly, there is a shift to a world in which there are 'many different expressions of modernity, or multiple modernities.'

In the face of these developments, writes Guinness, we need a 'global vision' that takes in:

The widest horizons of the fascinating, turbulent and volatile world of our day. This is the world of our time, and this is our moment before the Lord. Only by recognizing it can we hope to shoulder the responsibility of serving God's purposes at such a time and in such a generation.

In chapter two, 'The Greatest Challenges Ever', Guinness explores the triple challenge posed to the Church by the modern world. The first is the replacement of authority (including the authority of God) with preference. The second is an extreme fragmentation of contemporary culture that means that 'lives integrated by faith are harder to live and rarer to find than ever.' The third is the 'general shift in consciousness from the supernatural to the secular' which has meant that 'for many believers the supernatural has disappeared for all practical purposes from their day-to-day awareness.'

We need, says Guinness to understand these shifts and weigh their 'consequences for different areas of the life of faith' (how, for instance, they make evangelism easier, but discipleship much more difficult).

In chapter three, Guinness goes on to look at the reality of spiritual warfare. He argues that this is manifested: in the way that nations become idols and the savage and potentially ever more destructive conflicts that result from this; in the culture wars that have erupted in the public square in many countries and which make 'a mockery of civility and the common good'; and in the way in which 'the authority of Jesus and the Scriptures has been called into question within the camp of God's people almost as much as outside in the culture.'

In chapter four, 'Exploring the heart of darkness', Guinness considers what he calls the 'mudslide' that has affected the modern world, but which is clearest in United States. He declares that this mudslide is the result of 'three different but separately powerful trends.' The first is the 'deliberate and systematic rejection of the foundational place of the Jewish and Christian roots of American society.' Secondly, there is a lack of cultural solidity caused by three aspects of advanced modernity, 'a radical relativizing of truths and certainties,' a 'proliferating range of choices,' and 'an unprecedented rapidity of change,' The third is the 'Babel-like drive of evolutionary atheistic humanism to build a new humanity and a world without God.' This manifests itself in the idea that all accepted truths are simply 'socially constructed' and the way this idea is being used to fuel the current sexual revolution, and it has the long-term goal of seeking to create an entirely new humanity by using technology to breach the limits of the natural.

In chapter five, 'Life with No Amen', Guinness explores engagement with those who are atheist. He writes that we need to take atheists seriously:

Atheists may be small in numbers in the world as a whole, and even in much of the West, but in terms of their philosophy, their social location in society, their long-term vision and their strategies

and attitudes, they are disproportionately influential. As I said in an earlier chapter, it is often said that the fourth century AD was the hinge period between paganism and the Christian faith, and that the mid-twentieth century to the mid-twenty-first century is the hinge between the Christian faith and a new paganism. As Christians, we would dispute the latter because the transition is far from complete, but it would be a tragic mistake not to engage atheists in ways that might be beneficial both for them and for the wider interests of the Christian faith and our Western societies.

From a Christian viewpoint, there are three key reasons for such engagement. The first is 'Christian love' for people whose philosophy of life will never be ultimately satisfying for them. The second is the need to accept responsibility for the way in which Christians have helped to create atheism by the Church's historical oppression of freethinkers and dissent in general. The third is that Christians and atheists need to work together to forge 'a constructive way forward for humanity.'

Such co-working, Guinness needs to address three issues: freedom of conscience; the separation of Church and state; and how to develop a properly secular (ie 'this worldly') state 'which protects the foundational freedom of all believers, whether religious or secularist.' As Guinness sees it:

If their antagonism is not to prove the undoing of liberal democracy, they must come together in the common cause of freedom, justice and humanity. Nothing is more urgent for democratic societies than the forging of a civil and cosmopolitan public square that does justice to the interest of both parties in the relationship.

In chapter six, 'Yesterday, Today, Forever', Guinness explores what he calls 'generationalism' – the growing separation between different generations that is inhibiting the 'handing on of the best of the memory and the practices of the past.' Guinness argues that Christians should see this as a serious problem because in the biblical views:

...generations are the pulse beats of humanity, and every generation is close to God and responsible to God for its own times, and the transmission from one to another is as crucial to the people of God as it is to humanity at large. Woe betide the family, the nation or the church that fails to pass on its best and its wisest to the next generation!

The problem of generationalism has been exacerbated in our time, Guinness suggests, by the speed of change in modern society, the loss 'of older and more solid forms of social identity' and a consumer society which prioritises the new over the old. In response Christians must do three things. First 'we must refuse to bow to the idols of change that are at the core of generationalism.' Secondly, 'we must renew our appreciation of what healthy tradition and successful transmission require in social terms' (this means paying attention in particular to the importance of family life). Thirdly, 'we must remember the spiritual requirements for remaining faithful from generation to generation,' looking at what the Bible teaches us about the challenge of successful transmission.

In chapter seven, 'Give Us The Tools', Guinness looks at tools we need to fulfil the task God has given us in our generation. First, he says we need to use 'the weaponry required for spiritual warfare' as set out by Paul in Ephesians 6:10–20. Secondly, we need 'a grasp of the history of ideas' so that we can properly assess 'a fresh opinion or suddenly fashionable viewpoint' by seeing its back story. Thirdly, we need 'cultural analysis, the ability to describe and assess the culture we are living in, and in particular to gauge the impact of culture on our thinking and behaviour.'

According to Guinness employing these tools will not guarantee that we act correctly. However:

...if we take our Lord and the scriptures seriously, if we recognize the liability of our own chronic self-pride, if we ask the Lord to examine our hearts and remove the bias, and if we consciously rely on the Holy Spirit to correct and to guide us, then we may use the tools we have discussed with humility

and with profit. And we may use them not as an end to become better pundits but as the means to be wiser and more faithful servants of Jesus in our engagement with the world and the times in which we live.

In his Afterword, 'A Time to Stand', Guinness summarises his argument as follows:

In sum, our Western nations have both forgotten God and forgotten where they have come from. Now they are attempting to complete the process of severing the roots of Western civilization, destroying its root system, poisoning its soil and ruining its entire spiritual, moral and social ecology. Western societies may persist in forgetting God and rejecting his way, but whatever our societies do around us, we ought to remain faithful and keep open the place for God in our living. Our privilege is to host the absolute presence of God and to live the way of Jesus so that our difficult and lonely task as his followers is to be faithful and so to be different and to live differently.

God may stretch out his restraining hand and hold us back from the consequences of our settled choices. In his mercy, he may revive his church, and the Christian faith may flourish once again and provide the working faith of the West, or he may not. That is not for us to know. But our faith in God must always be the defining trust and the compass for our way of life. Living before the absolute presence of God, we are called to be faithful, and therefore unmanipulatable, unbribeable, undeterrable and unclubbable. We serve an impossible god, and we are to be God's impossible people. Let us then determine and resolved to be so faithful in all the challenges and ordeals the onrushing future brings that it may be said of us that we in our turn have served God's purpose in our generation. So help us God.

As in *Renaissance*, each chapter of *Impossible People* concludes with a prayer and questions for discussion.

Martin's opinion:

The three volumes that I have summarised above are, I would argue, key texts for our present moment. They tell us why we are where we are, what we need to do in this situation, and why, in spite of everything, we can still have hope. They should be read by all ministers in training and all ministers in post, as well as by as many lay people as possible, so that God's people may be better informed and equipped to serve God in this generation.

These are books that really matter. Buy copies for yourselves, lend copies to others, present copies as presents, but above all take to heart what Guinness has to say.