

Latimer Trust

Monthly Reading List – June 2026

This is a summary of recent books read by Martin Davie, compiling his evaluations and the commendations of others. This time Martin has not focused on newly published books, but on five books he has been reading recently and which he thinks are very valuable.

In this edition:

Author	Title	Martin's opinion
Mark Graham	<i>30 Key Moments in the History of Christianity: Inspiring True Stories from the Early Church Around the World</i>	An excellent popular introduction to the history of Christianity during its first thousand years. A very valuable resource for students beginning the study of church history and a good read for ordinary lay Christians who simply want to know more about the earliest days of the Church.
Otangelo Grasso	<i>The Shroud of Turin – A Forensic Summary of the Evidence</i>	Evangelical Protestants have an obligation to study the evidence about the Shroud and Grasso's book is the most comprehensive and up-to-date account of this evidence. In addition, the book has a wealth of historical information appertaining to Christ's sufferings, death and burial.
Robert Letham	<i>The Eternal Son</i>	An excellent example of orthodox Reformed theology at its best, rooted in a painstaking study of the Biblical witness. Students who already have a good working knowledge of the subjects and want to know more will find this study deeply rewarding.
Daniel Stevens	<i>Songs of the Son: Reading the Psalms with the Author of Hebrews</i>	A helpful study that hits the sweet spot of being scholarly but also readable by the non-expert. Useful to students and preachers wanting to understand Hebrews better and better understand how to read the Psalms in the light of the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ. The book would also make a good basis for a group Bible study course.
Carl Trueman	<i>The Desecration of Man: How the Rejection of God Degrades Our Humanity</i>	A persuasive piece of pre-apologetics, a ground clearing exercise that highlights the truth that the Western world faces a binary choice between self-destruction or a whole-hearted return to Christian belief. All educated Christians need to get hold of this book, read it, share it with others and use its contents as a starting point for conversations with their non-Christian friends.

Mark Graham, *30 Key Moments in the History of Christianity: Inspiring True Stories from the Early Church Around the World*, Baker Books, ISBN 978-1-54090-535-2, £74.54 (paperback, e and audio editions also available).

Overview:

Mark Graham is Professor of History at Grove City College in the United States. He has worked on archaeological projects in Carthage, Italy, Sardinia, and Corinth, stretching from the Bronze Age to the Byzantine Empire. and he has published on subjects as diverse as Ancient Empires, Roman frontiers, Roman media, Byzantine marble, eighteenth-century Jansenist universal historian Charles Rollin, and furthest afield, Charles Darwin's view of foreign missionaries.

The purpose of his new book is to provide a series of thirty stories that illustrate different aspects of the history of the Christian Church across the world from Britain to China during the first thousand years of its existence.

According to Graham:

Some of these stories will be familiar to many readers, such as some accounts of early Roman martyrs, the emperor Constantine's conversion, and the reforms of medieval Frankish emperor Charlemagne. I hope, though, that all readers will learn something new even within familiar stories. Most of the stories will likely not be so familiar – for example, a Sassanian Persian 'king of kings' calling and hosting a church council, the massacre of Christians by an Arabic-speaking convert to Judaism in a southern Arabian kingdom, and skilled archers saving the Nubian church from take-over by Muslim invaders.

The reason many of these stories are not well known in Western churches, he says is not only because 'the historical memory of many modern Western Christians, especially Protestants, is rather hazy for most of this first millennium (and usually the next half millennium too).' It is also because when Western Christians

.... do remember that first millennium of the church, we tend to focus exclusively on a narrative that moves directly from the ancient Roman Mediterranean world into medieval western Europe. The way we sometimes speak of the church 'becoming global' in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries results in part from this tendency to equate church history with the Christian history of Western civilization. If we have not encountered stories of vibrant Christianity from many other areas across time, then it certainly would appear as if a global church emerged only recently. But Christianity was, in fact, global from its earliest years, even if its roots were deepest in the Mediterranean region.

The thirty stories in the book are intended to correct this lack of accurate historical memory. The thirty stories are arranged in thirty chapters as follows:

- 1 A Christian "Contagion" and a "Good Sense" Governor (Black Sea, 112).
- 2 Justin Martyr Invents Christian Apologetics (Rome, 153).
- 3 A "City in the Sky" and a New Prophecy (Phrygia, Late Second Century).
- 4 "No Other Name": The Trials and Death of Vibia Perpetua (Carthage, 203).
- 5 Persecution, Schism, and a Doctrine of the Church (North Africa, c. 250).
- 6 The Christian Captives of Gundeshapur (Sassanian Persian Empire, c. 260).
- 7 The Birth of the First "Christian Nation" (Armenia, 301 or 314).
- 8 "In This Sign Conquer": Constantine Embraces Christianity (Rome, 312–313).
- 9 A North African House Divided – Again (Carthage and Arles, 314).
- 10 A Handsome Heretic at the First Ecumenical Council (Nicaea, 325).
- 11 War, Apocalypse, and the Great Slaughter of Christians (Sassanian Persian Empire, c. 340–379).

- 12 Priscillian of Ávila and the First Church Dispute to End in Execution (Spain and Rome, 380s).
- 13 A Persian “King of Kings” Calls a Church Council (Sassanian Persian Empire, 410).
- 14 Mobs and Murder in Alexandria (Egypt, 415).
- 15 Heresy Invades Post-Roman Britain (Southern Britain, 429).
- 16 Massacre and Revenge in Southern Arabia (Himyar/Yemen, 523–524).
- 17 Saints, Snakes, and Scriptures in Aksum (Ethiopia, Late Fifth to Early Sixth Centuries).
- 18 Pope Gregory the Great Launches Church-Sponsored Missions (Lombard Italy, 591).
- 19 The First Holy War and Its Unintended Consequences (Byzantine and Sassanian Persian Empires, c. 622).
- 20 “The Way” Arrives in Tang Dynasty China (Xi’an, 635).
- 21 Christian “Pupil Smitters” of Nubia Save Their Church – Twice (Sudan, 642 and 652).
- 22 A Matter of Matter: John of Damascus Defends Icons (Umayyad Islamic Empire, c. 730) .
- 23 “We Render Not Evil for Evil”: The Death of Boniface (Frisia, Northern Europe, 754).
- 24 Charlemagne and the Return of the Open Book to Europe (Carolingian Frankish Kingdom, 789).
- 25 “Faith Is a Thing of Will”: Alcuin of York Rejects Compulsion in Faith (Aachen, Carolingian Frankish Kingdom, 796).
- 26 Theodulf of Orleans Exalts the Only Truly “Good and Gracious King” (Angers, Carolingian Frankish Empire, 820?).
- 27 Cyril of Thessaloniki: Global Linguist, Diplomat, Missionary (Baghdad, Khazaria, Moravia, Venice, 850s and 860s).
- 28 Olga of the Rus’ Finds Faith (Constantinople and Kyiv, 950s).
- 29 Y1K: An Abbot, a Bishop, and End-Times Anxiety (Fleury, France, and York, England, c. 1000) .
- 30 Conclusion: “Unto the Ends of the Round World” at 1000.

Graham calls these chapters ‘moments’ and each of them consists of three parts. The first is a background section setting the chapter’s story in its historical context. The second tells the story itself and the third, what Graham calls ‘the Mathema’ from a Greek word meaning a lesson, seeks to ‘strike a balance between historical analysis and drawing out the message(s) that each moment can still hold for us today.’

In the final chapter Graham notes that we tend to tell the story of the history of Christianity either as ‘a tale of triumph or one of doom and despair’, with what was happening at the end of Christianity’s first millennium providing evidence that could be used to support both approaches. However, he argues that the lesson we need to take away from the stories in his book is that we need to resist

... both despair and triumphalism. Such has always been the call and the challenge to Our People through time and space, and it will be until time shall be no more.

Christ’s Kingdom has spread, is spreading, and will continue to spread throughout the round world. Right now, we are living in Christ’s kingdom, even while its true fullness remains to be seen. Like Augustine in the fifth century, we in the twenty-first century look for that day.

‘And there shall be fulfilled with the glory of Him every land: so be it, so be it. You have commanded, O Lord, so it is coming to pass: so it is coming to pass, until that which began with the river, may attain fully even under the ends of the round world.’

Martin’s opinion:

Graham’s book is an excellent popular introduction to the history of Christianity during its first thousand years. It is based on accurate and up-to-date scholarship, but it conveys the fruits of that scholarship in a very readable fashion

and does not just say what happened, but also what lessons, both of encouragement and warning, the first millennium provides for Christians today. A very valuable resource for students beginning the study of church history and a good read for ordinary lay Christians who simply want to know more about the earliest days of the Church. Highly recommended.

Commendations:

Simonetta Carr writes:

... church history must be approached with honesty, integrity, and appreciation of its complexity. We need serious historians to model this study for us and lead us into a careful and sober exploration. In *30 Key Moments in the History of Christianity*, Mark Graham does just that.

Otangelo Grasso, *The Shroud of Turin – A Forensic Summary of the Evidence*, Otangelo Grasso, ISBN 979-8-25023-744-4, £30.06 (e edition also available)

Overview:

For perfectly good historical and theological reasons, Protestant Christians are generally suspicious about historical claims made by the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. The problem is that this scepticism can on occasion lead to a refusal to accept historical claims which are in fact correct. Examples of this include the refusal to accept that the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem mark the places of Christ's birth, death and resurrection or that James was the first bishop of Jerusalem and Mark the first bishop of Alexandria.

The question of whether historical scepticism is or is not justified is the subject of the new book on the Shroud of Turin by the Swiss Italian writer Otangelo Grasso. The Shroud is a large piece of linen cloth (14 ft 5 in × 3 ft 7 in) carrying the image of a corpse, that since the sixteenth century has been preserved in the cathedral in Turin (hence the name) and which has been believed since at least the Middle Ages to be the burial shroud of Christ himself, with the image of his dead body miraculously imposed upon it.

Protestants have traditionally been sceptical about this belief as part of their more general suspicion of relics in general. It is also widely held that the matter of the shroud's authenticity was put to bed in 1988 when a radiocarbon test dated the cloth to between 1260 and 1390 AD. What Grasso does in his book is make out in exhaustive detail the case for the potential authenticity of the Shroud in the face of such scepticism.

His book is divided into five parts.

Part I is 'What is the Shroud?' This part,

... establishes the cloth as a material object – its weave, its fibres, its environmental traces, and above all its image, a photographic negative encoding three-dimensional information, possessing properties that no known artistic technique, mediaeval or modern, has been able to reproduce.

Part 2 is 'The Passion.'

Having established what the Shroud is, we ask what it shows. Part II follows the chronological sequence of the Passion – from Gethsemane to the tomb – examining each stage as a forensic record. The scourging, the crown of thorns, the crucifixion, the moment of death, the burial: each yields anatomical and physiological detail that no mediaeval forger could have fabricated and no mediaeval physician could have known.

Part 3 is 'The Shroud through history.'

Where has this cloth been? Part III traces the available historical evidence from the Shroud's first documented appearance in Lirey France in 1355, backwards through the fragmentary record towards Constantinople, Edessa and Jerusalem. The gaps are acknowledged. The evidence that survives is examined fairly. History supports but does not prove authenticity – it is consistent with an ancient origin and a transit through precisely the regions the material evidence suggests.

Part 4 is 'Is it authentic?'

Here we confront the radiocarbon test of 1988 which dated the cloth to between 1260 and 1390 AD, and the scientific controversy that has surrounded that result ever since. The STURP [Shroud of Turin Research Project] findings, the statistical irregularities in the radiocarbon data, the evidence for contamination or repair, and the forgery hypothesis are examined in sequence. The radiocarbon result is not dismissed – it is placed alongside evidence that contradicts a mediaeval origin, and the reader is invited to weigh all of it.

Finally, Part 5 is 'What does it mean?'

This final section is explicitly theological. It does not claim to be proven by the preceding evidence but made possible by it. For those who find the material case compelling, Part V asks what the shroud reveals about the passion, the resurrection, and the gospel. It is an invitation not a conclusion.

Martin's opinion:

Readers of this book list might well ask why they should spend their time considering the nature of a Catholic relic. The answer is simple. If the Shroud is genuine, then it is the single most important historical artefact the world contains and a hugely important material witness to Christ's death and resurrection. Evangelical Protestants therefore have an obligation to study the evidence about the matter and Grasso's 649 page book is the most comprehensive and up-to-date account of this evidence. In addition, part 2 of the book has a wealth of historical information appertaining to Christ's sufferings, death and burial. If you want to know precisely what the Son of God went through for your salvation, then read this part of the book. In summary, a very important read.

Robert Letham, *The Eternal Son*, P&R publishing, ISBN 978-1-62995-863-7, £29:99 (e and audio book versions also available).

Overview:

Robert Letham is a Presbyterian minister and theologian who is director of research and senior lecturer in systematic and historical theology at Wales Evangelical School of Theology.

His new book *The Eternal Son* is the second volume of a projected trilogy of books on the three persons of the Godhead that follows on from his 2019 study *The Holy Trinity*. It is the second volume of the series after his very well received book *The Holy Spirit*, published in 2023.

As Letham explains in his introduction, his new work is based on the conviction that:

... Christology is a vital subject. Virtually every error and heresy is at root a departure from the orthodox doctrine of Christ. A crucial and perennial need of the church is to believe and trust in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Right belief, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, is the root of right practice. The knowledge of the eternal Son, who, for us and our salvation, became man, is eternal life. It is true for the church as it is for the individual and family. Beyond that, it reaches out into the world and impacts the way that people live, whether for good or ill, as the influence of the truth waxes or wanes.

The need to 'maintain and enhance' our knowledge of Christ is made even more urgent by the existence of the false assumption that matters to do with Christology were settled at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. In reality,

The struggles over the person of Christ did not end at Chalcedon; they rumbled on and even intensified in the two hundred or so years that followed. Indeed, Chalcedon created at least as many problems as it solved. Those who think Chalcedon solved everything are doomed to repeat many of the problems that followed it. Very similar problems have reared their heads in the past decade or two in circles that might be supposed safe from such dangers. The real risk is that erroneous teaching on the person of Christ may gain ground again and ultimately threaten the gospel that is taught. For that reason, I have devoted a considerable amount of space in this book to a discussion of those ensuing matters. These chapters may seem at times abstruse, but they are vital, and the need to grasp their content is urgent.

The book is divided into eleven chapters which Letham summarises as follows:

In the first three chapters of what follows, we will explore the relations of the Son within the Trinity, follow biblical leads on God's decision that the eternal Son take human nature into personal union, and then consider the amazing wonders of the incarnation. This will draw us in chapters 4 through 8 to a detailed analysis of the development of the church's path to an understanding of the personal identity of Jesus in the wake of teachings that effectively undermined the gospel. In chapters 9 and 10, we will discuss issues that arose in the Reformation era, in the aftermath of the Enlightenment, and down to the present day. The final chapter will regard the whole process of salvation as centred from beginning to end in the Son.

Martin's opinion:

This book is an excellent example of orthodox Reformed theology at its best. It is rooted in a painstaking study of the Biblical witness but also engages in a critical appropriation of the Christological teaching of the Church down the ages and a critical study of the departures from traditional understanding of the biblical witness that are being proposed in our day. It also explains the interconnection between the doctrines of the person of Christ and the doctrines of atonement and election. It is a book aimed at students who already have a good working knowledge of the subjects it covers and want to know more and think more deeply. Anyone who comes into this category will find this study deeply rewarding.

Commendations:

Ryan McGraw comments:

Letham's treatment of the eternal Son is full of biblical and historical insights into the person and work of Jesus Christ. Particularly noteworthy is the author's extended attention to medieval Christological developments,

since many Protestants today are unaware that most of our Christological heritage is based in the medieval rather than the earlier church ... Anyone desiring deeper insight into who and what Jesus is as the foundation of how he saves will find an excellent introduction here.

Daniel Stevens, *Songs of the Son: Reading the Psalms with the Author of Hebrews*, Crossway, ISBN 978-1-43359-213-3, £13.99 (e and audio editions also available).

Overview:

Daniel Stevens is assistant professor of New Testament Interpretation at Boyce College, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the United States. His new book on the use made of the Psalms in the letter to the Hebrews consists of an introduction and nine main chapters looking in turn at Hebrew's use of Psalms 2, 8, 22, 40, 45, 95, 102, 110 and 118. These chapters are followed by a conclusion and an appendix explaining why Psalm 104 is not on the list of Psalms that are considered.

The starting point for Stevens' study is his conviction that:

Through paying close attention to how Hebrews reasons with the Psalms, we will see Jesus more clearly and learn to read the Psalms the apostles' way, as the songs of the Son.

As Stevens explains, the reason that this is the case is because:

More than any other inspired writer, the author of Hebrews develops his argument by reasoning with the Scriptures of Israel and particularly with the Psalms. Far more than simply quoting the Psalms as illustrations or proof texts, the author of Hebrews composes his entire letter as a series of arguments from the Psalms and other Old Testament texts in light of Jesus's, life, death, resurrection, ascension, ongoing work, and coming return.

Nowhere else do we have such a dense and sustained interaction with one book of Scripture by another. While the author weaves together texts from all of the Old Testament Canon, deftly synthesising the law, the prophets, and the writings as he demonstrates the superiority of Christ, it is to the Psalms that he returns again and again. At crucial points in his argument as he explains or applies or clarifies, the author of Hebrews reaches consistently for the Psalms. Since this is the case, it will be particularly helpful for us to explore how the author reads the Psalms ...

It is my conviction that if we read the Psalms with the author of Hebrews, we will learn to read the Psalms for what they truly are. Their meanings will unfold as we see precisely how they witness to Christ: not only as predictions to be fulfilled but also as testimony to the very voice of God – the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. In the voice of the psalmists, the Son reveals his nature, his mission, and his relationship with his father and his people.

According to Stevens:

If this book serves its purpose, you will not just know more about what Hebrews argues or about the handful of Psalms that the author cites. Instead, you will have a fuller and more accurate view of how the Psalter as a whole works. When you return to the divine song book of the church, you will not only see it as a window into the life of David or the worship of Israel but also read and sing it for what it has always truly been, the songs of the Son.

Martin's opinion:

Stevens' book is a helpful study that hits the sweet spot of being scholarly but also readable by the non-expert. It will prove useful to students and preachers wanting to understand Hebrews better and students and preachers wanting to better understand how to read the Psalms in the light of the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ. The book would also make a good basis for a group Bible study course. This is a book that is well worth buying.

Commendations:

Christopher Ash declares:

This delightful book is beautifully written, rooted in careful scholarship, and pastorally sensitive. One does not have to agree with every detail of the author's readings to appreciate their aid in embracing the Psalms in

deeply Christian ways. The way Stevens moves to and fro between the Psalms and the letter to the Hebrews is a profoundly refreshing model of how to read Psalms in the light of the whole Bible.

Carl Trueman, *The Desecration of Man: How the Rejection of God Degrades Our Humanity*, Sentinel, ISBN 978-0-59371-385-3, £25.99 (e and audio editions also available).

Overview:

Carl Trueman is professor of biblical and religious studies at Grove City College in the United States. He is a highly regarded church historian who is best known for his influential study of the development of contemporary secular identity, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*, first published in 2020.

Trueman's new book *The Desecration of Man* can best be seen as a follow up to this previous volume. If *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* describes the history of the emergence of modern secular anthropology, then *The Desecration of Man* describes its consequences.

As Trueman explains in the introduction to his new book,

I would argue that the modern notion of man – free and autonomous as demonstrated by his ability to transgress boundaries once considered sacred – has paradoxically reduced him to nothing. In desecrating God, man has ironically desecrated himself.

To put it simply, by rejecting the authority of God (desecration) in the name of freedom and autonomy, humanity has destroyed itself.

In Trueman's view, the answer to the destruction wrought by desecration is consecration:

... consecration, like the desecration to which it needs to respond, has a specific shape. Only by the true consecration of man can his desecration be overcome. And that requires a return not simply to the alleged cultural benefits of Christian belief and practise but to actual Christian belief and practice.

He develops this argument in six main chapters plus a postscript.

In chapter 1, Trueman explains that 'theologically speaking,' modern man

... defines himself by a programme of desecration: the transgression of those limits, obligations, and ends that were traditionally grounded in the idea that he was a divine image bearer.

In chapters 2–3 Trueman builds on Friedrich Nietzsche's parable of the madman announcing the death of God in his book *The Gay Science* and declares that,

having rejected God, our world has to create its own values based upon itself because it does not believe in anything transcendent. A world with no creator leaves the task of creation to us. We have to become self-creators.

That is why the modern Western world has the ideas of personal self-creation and self-expression at its heart.

In chapters 4–6 Trueman looks at how the development of technology has been harnessed in support of the project of human self-creation in three key areas of human existence, sex, reproduction, and death.

In chapter 4 he examines how the sexual revolution 'promised liberation but, in detaching sex from any greater teleology and in making it the most central obsession of our age, it has paradoxically reduced human beings to objects, to things.'

In chapter 5 he explains how:

... reproductive technologies such as in vitro fertilization (IVF), well-intentioned as they may be, have turned babies into commodities and also facilitated the resurgence of eugenics. Again, man's immense technological power has allowed him to overcome old, natural limits and ends but only at the cost of reducing him.

In chapter 6 he considers how we now attempt to ignore, trivialise or control death rather than accept its full reality and how this means that 'we again reduce the value of our lives and desecrate that once considered holy.'

In chapter 7 Trueman argues that the appeals to Christian cultural values without acceptance of the truth of Christianity by figures such as Richard Dawkins and Roger Scruton are inadequate responses to the 'culture of desecration.' In his view

... there are only two ways to address the question 'What is man?' We can embrace Nietzsche's challenge and continue the project of self-creation, thereby becoming gods ourselves; or we can embrace the Christian faith, with its dogmas, its cultic practises, and its ethics. We can be Nietzscheans or we can be Christians. There is no stable third option. We must choose today whom we will follow: Christianity's Messiah or Nietzsche's madman.

Finally, in his postscript Trueman reiterates his key point that

... a comprehensive and durable answer to the desecration of man requires more than a sentimental attachment to the values of cultural Christianity, or taking aesthetic pleasure in the beauty of religious rituals. It will need deep roots in the dogmatic truth, the liturgical forms, and the practical code of Christianity. Only this will reshape our imaginations in a way that makes us truly human.

Martin's opinion:

The Desecration of Man is an important book. As Trueman himself explains, it is not a book of apologetics in the sense of being a book that seeks to establish or defend the truth of Christian theology. What it is instead is a persuasive piece of pre-apologetics, a ground clearing exercise that highlights the truth that the Western world faces a binary choice between continuing down the self-destructive path of attempted self-creation or a whole-hearted return to Christian belief and the patterns of worship and ethics that stem from it. All educated Christians need to get hold of this book, read it, share it with others and use its contents as a starting point for conversations with their non-Christian friends and neighbours about the continuing importance of Christian belief.

Commendations:

Tim Challies comments:

This book is both sobering and hopeful, for it not only traces the problem but also proposes the best of all solutions.