

Chapter 1 : Christ the Power of God and the Wisdom of God

Crucifixion, by Martin Hengel (ch. 1, "The 'Folly' of the Crucified Son of God") by dmwestfall6 While my research for my doctoral topic focuses primarily on the theological importance seen in the cross of Christ, the historical and social significance of the cross in its ancient context form an important background against which Paul.

I have heard the Gospel preached hundreds of times and preached it about that many times myself. Thus, like most Christians, I relate to the good news of what God has done in Jesus Christ as a familiar friend. It comforts me, encourages me, and motivates me. But it does not perplex or scandalize me. When the Apostle Paul preached the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, most of those who heard him were unimpressed. Others who heard the Gospel were offended. Jews, in particular, were scandalized by the thought of a crucified messianic pretender being the Lord and Savior of the world. The Greek of 1 Corinthians 1: Gentiles were equally unimpressed with the message of a crucified savior. The fact that God would become human in order to save sinful human beings is at first a mystery, and then a source of wonder. The fact that God accomplished our salvation by taking our sin upon himself in Christ and dying the cruelest of deaths should at first stun us, and then fill us with wonder and gratitude. Have you ever thought of the Gospel as a stumbling block or even as nonsense? Do you know others who think this way? How does the unexpected and counterintuitive nature of the Gospel impress you? Gracious Father, I must confess that I am so familiar with the good news of your Son that I can take it for granted. It seems so ordinary at times. In my nonchalance, I forget the extraordinary miracle of the Incarnation, not to mention the crucifixion. Forgive me, Lord, for trifling with one of the most precious mysteries of the cosmos. Give me fresh eyes to see your amazing grace in Christ. Help me to sing anew the classic words of Charles Wesley: Died He for me, who caused His painâ€” For me, who Him to death pursued? How can it be, That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me? Who can explore His strange design? In vain the firstborn seraph tries To sound the depths of love divine. Let earth adore, Let angel minds inquire no more. Let earth adore; Let angel minds inquire no more. Help us finish the year strong. We ask that you prayerfully consider joining us in this work! Donate Donate Every resource on our site was made possible through the financial support of people like you.

crucified men in even greater contempt because to them crucifixion was a sign of God 's curse on the victim. Paul's preaching of Christ crucified thus cut deeply.

I also wanted to suggest similarities between the two movies and to draw attention to the obvious attempts from the marketing team behind *Son of God* to apply lessons learned during the brouhaha surrounding *The Passion of the Christ*. Today I want to dig in just a little bit more. I suppose I am going to be a tad contrary here, but I want to give us something to think about before we buy our tickets. Sponsor Become a Patron Now listen: I know many people who read this site have thought about the movie, will go to see it, and will enjoy it. I also know many people who read this site will not go to see the movie because they too have thought about it and are convicted it would be wrong for them to go. I believe this is one of those areas in which Christians need to acknowledge that some will believe the very opposite of what they themselves believe. Convictions will vary, even among Christians of the same theological stripe, which makes it an ideal time to obey Romans 14 and to refuse to pass judgment on one another. I will allow David Wells to describe the difference: Here is what I want to think about: A film cannot adequately capture the reality of what transpired between the Father and the Son while the Son hung upon the cross. If this is true, a film that displays the crucifixion but misses the cross might actually prove a hindrance rather than a help to the Christian faith. Even the best movie will still be hampered by a grave weakness. Words and pictures are very different media, and in the history of redemption, God has used both. For example, in the Old Testament God used words to record prophecies about the coming Messiah while in the tabernacle he provided pictures of the coming Messiah and what he would accomplish—“an altar for sacrifice, a lamb to be slaughtered, incense rising to God. Words can tell truth while pictures can display truth. When it comes to the cross, God has given us four written eyewitness accounts but no visual accounts. What we do know, though, is that every medium has limitations. While visual media are excellent at conveying feelings, they are poorly suited to conveying ideas. Words are able to tell what happened at the cross in a way that pictures cannot. At the cross we encounter something no picture can tell. Its reality cannot be displayed. Even the eyewitnesses of the cross, those who saw it all unfold, walked away ignorant that day, needing words to explain what had happened there. When we see the crucifixion, our eyes see excruciating physical suffering; when we read about the cross, our hearts recoil at soul-crushing spiritual suffering. When we see the crucifixion, our eyes see soldiers punishing an innocent man; when we read about the cross, our minds grapple with God the Father pouring out his wrath upon his sinless Son. When we see the crucifixion, we see a man stripped naked and slowly dying; when we read about the cross we see Christ Jesus clothed in our unrighteousness. When it comes to understanding the cross, only words will do, only words are sufficient. David Wells explains this in a powerful way in his new book *God in the Whirlwind*: For the soldiers who carried it out, it was an unexceptional part of their routine. As for the Jewish leaders who had opposed Christ, it was a fitting end to their problem. Soon, they were back to business as usual. And although the resurrection was to happen shortly thereafter, and although the disciples were to be emboldened in their preaching, and although the Holy Spirit was to authenticate what they said by miracles, the historians of that day also missed the significance of this event. There is a distinction between the crucifixion and the cross. The former was a particularly barbaric way of carrying out an execution, and it was the method of execution that Jesus endured. It was there that our judgment fell on the One who is also our Judge. Indeed, he who had made all of creation was dishonored in the very creation he had made. This, however, was not seen from the outside. It would be a death like any other death except for its disgrace. God must interpret his own actions, and so he has. Without this, we too are mute. They give us the crucifixion, not the cross. They show the horrifying circumstances of his death. These circumstances may be shown accurately. But this can take us only so far. It leaves us with only a biographical Christ, who may be interesting, but not with the eternal Christ whom we need for our salvation. The crucifixion without the cross is an incomplete picture, a half-told story. What is omitted is the meaning of the event. We do not carry this meaning within ourselves, nor can we find it in this world. What eludes us is something we have to be given by God himself, for only he can say what was

happening within the Godhead as Christ was killed and, in his death, atoned for our sin. This is indispensable to the meaning of Christian faith. The cross of Christ is not less than the crucifixion, but it is certainly far, far more. Before you line up to see *Son of God*, do at least consider what Wells says: Those who see the film without being told the rest of the story may actually understand less about the person and work of Christ than if they had never seen it at all. A moment ago I said that God has given us no visual representations of the cross, but that is not strictly true. He did give us one: It may be worth challenging yourself whether you are more excited to see the film or to remember what Christ did at the cross by participating in that God-given picture.

Chapter 3 : Son of God Will Show Crucifixion, Not the Cross - Tim Challies

The 'folly' of the crucified Son of God Prometheus and Dionysus: the 'crucified' and the 'crucifying' God Docetism as a way of removing the 'folly' of the cross.

Pulpit Commentary Verse It was only by slow degrees that the title "the Christ," i. They had for centuries been looking for a regal and victorious Messiah, who should exalt their special privileges. These two verses, translated into Syriac, furnish a marked play on words miscol, stumbling block; mashcal, folly; seed, cross ; and some have seen in this a sign that St. Paul thought in Syriac. Both alike had failed. The Jew had not attained ease of conscience or moral perfectness; the Greek had. The accent of profound contempt is discernible in all the early allusions of Greeks and Romans to Christianity. The only epithets which they could find for it were "execrable," "malefic," "depraved," "damnable" Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny, etc. The milder term is "excessive superstition. Aurelius only under the aspect of a "bare obstinacy. This is the sum and substance of the gospel. Christ crucified is the foundation of all our hopes, the fountain of all our joys. And by his death we live. The preaching of salvation for lost sinners by the sufferings and death of the Son of God, if explained and faithfully applied, appears foolishness to those in the way to destruction. The sensual, the covetous, the proud, and ambitious, alike see that the gospel opposes their favourite pursuits. It pleased him, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe. By the foolishness of preaching; not by what could justly be called foolish preaching. But the thing preached was foolishness to worldly-wise men. The gospel ever was, and ever will be, foolishness to all in the road to destruction. The message of Christ, plainly delivered, ever has been a sure touchstone by which men may learn what road they are travelling. But the despised doctrine of salvation by faith in a crucified Saviour, God in human nature, purchasing the church with his own blood, to save multitudes, even all that believe, from ignorance, delusion, and vice, has been blessed in every age. And the weakest instruments God uses, are stronger in their effects, than the strongest men can use. Not that there is foolishness or weakness in God, but what men consider as such, overcomes all their admired wisdom and strength.

Chapter 4 : Crucifixion In The Ancient World And The Folly Of The Message Of The Cross by Martin Hengel

Abbreviations Introduction: Mors turpissima crucis 1. The 'folly' of the crucified Son of God 2. Prometheus and Dionysus: the 'crucified' and the 'crucifying' God.

He was a member of what we would call the Early High Christology Club and provided some of the best scholarship out there. This is apparent also in his short little book on the nature of crucifixion. When I say short, I mean it. You can read this one easily in a couple of hours. Doing so will be an excellent investment of those two hours. That it is short does not mean that it is not scholarly. It is incredibly packed with information. Those who want to say they seriously question the New Testament should have no problem as hardly any of it comes from the New Testament. Crucifixion is talked about from various sources. Of course, the New Testament has a lot to say about it, but others at the time had their own statements about it as well. If there was really in fact one lesson that could be learned from this book and one that I wish all readers would learn, Christian and non, it is this. The cross was a scandal. Many people have not really had this sink in. To say that the crucified Jesus was the Messiah and you worshiped Him as God would be like saying that you think a pimp on the streets should be the next Pope or that you think a child molester would make a great president of the Southern Baptist Convention. This is one reason docetism and gnosticism both found their way into Christianity early on. Both of these would have a way of denying the crucifixion. Is it any shock that even in Islam, you have it being denied that Jesus died by crucifixion? It is incredible to think that the Messiah who was seen as sharing in the divine identity of the God of Israel would be crucified. Hengel in his work goes through several quotes from writers at the time who put crucifixion on the lowest point possible. It was certainly not something you would casually talk about over dinner when you were together. Say the word and it is quite likely that people would fall back in disgust at the very thought of it. Crucifixion was simply as Hengel says, barbaric, and it was in fact the worst penalty that could be given to someone. The act of crucifixion was designed to not only kill the person involved, but shamefully kill then in a highly painful process. In fact, this is where we get the word "excruciating" from. The word means "out of the cross. That is not the kind of event that would draw sympathy from others. Instead, it would have been the exact opposite. It would have cemented any idea of Jesus being the Messiah as false. This is why Paul in 1 Cor. In all of this, somehow Christianity survived. It must have been something massive that overcame the shame of the cross. His is looking at the nature of crucifixion from a historical point of view. It is wanting the reader to learn how crucifixion was viewed at the time of Jesus and a few centuries before and after. It should open the eyes of the reader still to what exactly Jesus went through and how this would have been perceived. As I said, this is a short book, but if you want to learn about crucifixion, it is a massively important one to read. Go invest that couple of hours. It will be worth it.

Chapter 5 : Crucifixion: In the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross | Fortress Press

Crucifixion - in the ancient world and the folly of the message of the cross. Excerpt Crucifixion was already, as in Rome, the punishment for serious crimes against the state and for high treason among the Persians, to some degree in Greece and above all among the Carthaginians.

There Polus tries to refute Socrates by a particularly horrifying example which is nevertheless probably based on the political realities of the time: If a man is caught in a criminal plot to make himself tyrant, and when caught is put to the rack and mutilated and has his eyes burnt out and after himself suffering and seeing his wife and children suffer many other signal outrages of various kinds is finally crucified. To a man who has been put in a coat of pitch, will he be happier than if he escaped arrest, established himself as a tyrant and lived the rest of his life a sovereign in his state, doing what he pleased, an object of envy and felicitation among citizens and strangers alike? Through his cunning and lack of scruple the unjust man will acquire power and riches and with them the appearance of the utmost uprightness, whereas the completely just man will have to be scourged, racked, fettered, blinded, and finally, after the uttermost suffering, he will be impaled. He was tortured for many days and orders were given for him to be crucified. The unjust man will have to be scourged, racked, fettered, blinded, and finally, after the uttermost suffering, he will be impaled, and so will learn his lesson that not to be put to seem to be just is what we ought to desire. It is significant that Christian writers - e. Clement of Alexandria and the author of the Acta Apollonii - are the first deliberately to take up again the theme of the crucified just man in Plato. Where other ancient authors possibly allude to it - with the exception of Lucian see p. For Christian interpretation since the Acta Apollonii 39f. Benz see bibliography, 3 iff. Seneca, Dialogue 2 De constantia sapientis. Significantly enough, the rare word *avaoKivSafvJXeveiv* only reappears in the church fathers with express reference to Plato, see Eusebius, Praeparatio Evangelica. However, the torture which came first probably helped to shorten the actual torments of crucifixion, which were caused above all by the duration of the suffering. A later text explicitly states that hanging on the gallows *furca*, which gradually took the place of crucifixion after the time of Constantine and the later Christian emperors of the fourth century, was essentially a more humane punishment: For the gallows kills the victim immediately, whereas the cross tortures for a long time those who are fixed to it. *Nam adpoenos statim exanimat, crux autem subfixos diu cruciat.* Blinzler see bibliography, 32iff. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Antiquitates Romanae 5. Nero was threatened with flogging as a death penalty more *maiorum* Suetonius, Nero. According to the saga it was carried out publicly as early as by King Tarquinius Superbus: Dio Cassius 2, fr. Scipio Africanus maior acted in this way in Spain to preserve military discipline Dio Cassius 16 after Zonaras 9. Fimbrias used the punishment in Macedonia in the Mithridatic war Dio Cassius, fr. IX 159off. For the combination of flogging and crucifixion see Livy. See Fulda see bibliography, 115ff. Crucifixion 30 Punic War more harshly than the Latin allies: In the form of a verse, Maecenas compares the illnesses and griefs of his old age with the torments of the crucified man; nevertheless, he is determined to hold on to life at any price: *Fashion me with a palsied hand, weak of foot and a cripple. Build upon me a crook-backed hump, Shake my teeth till they rattle. All is well if my life remains. Save, oh, save it, I pray you, Though I sit on the piercing cross. Debilem facito manu debilem pede coxo. Tuber adstrue gibberum, lubricos quote dentes; Vita dum superest, benest; hanc mihi, ml acuta Sisedeam cruce, sustine. Est tanti vulnus suum premere et patibulo pendere districtum, dum differat id, quod est in malis optimum, supplicii finem?* There follows a description of the gradual expiry of the victim of crucifixion which is unique in ancient literature: *Can a man be found willing to be fastened to the accursed tree, long sickly, already deformed, swelling with ugly weals on shoulders and chest, and drawing the breath of life amid long drawn-out agony? He would have many excuses for dying even before mounting the cross. Invenitur aliquis, qui velit inter supplicia tabescere et perire membratim et totiens per stilicia emittere animam quam semel exhalare?* Statements of this kind, which go against all the historical evidence, are prompted by the questionable tendency to draw a dividing line between New Testament remarks about the bloody sacrificial death of Jesus and the Pauline theology of the cross.

which is still held in high esteem. It should be noted that in Roman times not only was it the rule to nail the victim by both hands and feet, but that the flogging 24 y 25 2 3 Cf. Dialogue 3 De ira 1 2. An ego, si te et Gabinium cruci suffixos viderem, maiore adficerer laetitia ex corporis vestri laceratione quam adficio ex famae? Or if I were to see y o u and Gabinius fixed to a cross, should I feel a greater j o y at the laceration of your bodies than I do at that of y o u r reputations? Brandenburger see bibliography , 18; cf. F o r an answer I can only refer to Josephus, Antiquitates Jeremias, The Eucharistic Words of Jesus, London and New York , , w h o puts forward the same view as Brandenburger, b u t from a v e r y different perspective. Blinzler see bibliography , 36if. Binding the victim to the cross only with bonds remained the exception. T h e evidence from Seneca and elsewhere also shows that even where crucifixion is only used as a simile or metaphor, its gruesome reality could very well be before the eyes of the writer. In essentials, this will also be the case with Christian talk of the cross up to the time of the edict of toleration in A D Not only were crosses set up all over the empire, but Christians themselves will either have been executed on the cross or at least will have to have reckoned with crucifixion or similar punishment. In X e n o p h o n of Ephesus, Ephesiaca 4. S e e n o w also the discovery of a skeleton of a crucified man in Jerusalem in which the nail is still in the heel bones: Pliny the Elder, Historia Naturalis Justin, Dialogue with Trypho Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiae 2. Simeon son of Clopas of Jerusalem under Trajan according t o Hegesippus; 8. Further instances in P. Garnsey see bibliography , i27f. T h e continuing legal tradition which can be seen here is brought to an end by the jurist Julius Paulus about A D In the Sententiae compiled from his works towards A D , the crux is put at the head of the three summa supplicia. In the lists of penalties given in the sources, damnatio ad bestias often takes the place of decapitation as an aggravated penalty. This shows that decollatio was not always included among the summa supplicia. A t the same 1 2 1 In Verrem 2. Italia autem alumnum suum servitutis extremo summoque supplicio adfixum videret Italy might see h e r son as he hung there suffer the worst extremes of tortures inflicted upon slaves. Philo, In Flaccum 72 see p. F o r an enumeration of these supreme penalties see also Sallust, Bellum Iugurthinum Here we can see the further development of capital punishment during the later empire. Garnsey see bibliography , Professor Louis Robert has called m y attention to an inscription, a better reading of which has recently been published, which comes f r o m M y r a in Lycia and f r o m the time of Claudius. According to this the imperial legate, of senatorial rank, w h o was entrusted with the administration of the new province, scourged a slave w h o had accepted some doubtful documents f o r the city archives, although he had been warned against this, and threatened that if he offended again he would be punished most severely: I would compel the rest of the city slaves to forget their earlier negligence n o t only with blows but with the supreme penalty against him ov 7rA77ya. Myra Istanbuler Forschungen 30, , lines 1 4 - 1 9. F o r the avwrdrw npojpia see op. Philo, In Flaccum ; L. In the M y r a inscription the reading quoted above is to be preferred t o an earlier one which presupposes a reference to crucifixion here. Brasiello, La repressione penale in diritto romano, Naples , !. Zestermann see bibliography , 25L Crucifixion as the supreme Roman penalty

Chapter 6 : The Folly of the Gospel | Daily Reflection | The High Calling

The Folly of the Crucifixion For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning will I bring to nought."

Reviews and comments about all and everything. This blog is NOT affiliated with any commercial vendor! Saturday, July 28, The folly of the cross or the crucifixion of reason? While I disagree with Hengel a Christian theologian on a number of points, I found the books interesting and stimulating. Unfortunately, this is not the case with "Crucifixion", which feels too narrowly apologetic. Who would worship a god from Galilee? Since the early Christians did, that proves something supernatural was involved I believe Richard Carrier has effectively disposed of these ideas in his book "Not the impossible faith". Thus, Hengel admits that the Roman hero Marcus Atilius Regulus was sometimes said to have been crucified by the vile Carthaginians. The goddess Andromeda was called "the crucified maiden". Yet, Hengel claims that no Jew could have regarded a crucified man as the Messiah. The Messiah would have been a freedom fighter. Besides, the Christians claimed that Jesus had been resurrected after his shameful death, thereby proving that he actually was the Messiah and undoing the curse of the cross. In the Wisdom of Solomon, a righteous man claiming to be the Son of God is condemned by his enemies to a "shameful death". At least some Jews would have understood this as a reference to the Messiah. Once again, what is the problem with a freedom fighter being shamefully crucified? Hengel also have problems with the many symbolic crosses and crucifixions of pagan thought and mythology. He brushes them aside as "docetic", claiming that the crucifixion of Jesus was the real thing. But surely there could be a connection? Plato talks about the righteous man being hanged on a pole, and the Son of God lying cross-wise across the universe. Docetic or not, this is remarkably similar to Christian formulations, something pointed out by both Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria. Justin called Christianity "perfected Platonism". Hengel seems to imagine that if the crucifixion of Jesus is a real historical event, it simply cannot have any further symbolic significance, except the one given it by official NT exegetes. A surprisingly simplistic attitude for an erudite scholar. But then, Hengel have always been wary of any overtly pagan antecedents for Christianity. This is curious, since he has written several books on the Hellenization of the Jews after the Greek conquest of the Levant and Egypt. Hellenism was, of course, pagan. Hengel seems perfectly happy with Jewish precursors to the Christian concept of the Son of God, but he is at pains to reject all and sundry pagan influences. Sometimes, I wonder whether he really means what he says, since he is perfectly aware of some rather striking parallels, such as the worship of Dionysus not far from Cana, where Jesus is said to have performed a Dionysian miracle turning water into wine. It seems that Hengel crucified his reason for the sake of a narrow, orthodox apologetic. Some things are too hot to handle

Chapter 7 : A Crucifix is One of the Signs of Orthodoxy

To say that the crucified Jesus was the Messiah and you worshiped Him as God would be like saying that you think a pimp on the streets should be the next Pope or that you think a child molester would make a great president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

As we draw together the threads of this retreat we find that the rich tapestry they form takes the shape, well known but still shocking and challenging, of the crucified one. All Christian ministry of whatever kind is a living in Christ and a living out of the life of Christ before the world, and it is right that we should pause at this point and bring to explicit and focal statement what has been implicit all along. It is in him, as the true Solomon if you like, that we discover, as Paul says elsewhere, that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. It is when we stand at the foot of the cross that we discover the true identity of Lady Wisdom, calling to the simple to turn aside and enter, to eat her bread and drink her wine. The Messiah is the ultimate interpreter, of God to the world and the world to God, of God to ourselves and ourselves to God, indeed of ourselves to ourselves, assuring us that while we may have meant it for evil, God meant it for good. It is in him that we are rooted and grounded, that we find our ultimate terroir, the soil that nourishes us and makes us what we are. And, particularly, it is in him that the dark theme of suffering comes to full expression. So as Paul teaches the muddled Corinthians, divided and confused as they were about many things, where they may find the wisdom that upstages the wisdom of the world, he brings them back to the very heart of it all, the centre of all Christian living and hence the centre of all Christian ministry. Being ordained is partly about standing up in public as a sign – God help us! Listen again to what Paul says: He that is, God is the source of your life in the Messiah, Jesus, who became for us the wisdom of God, yes, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, the one who boasts should boast of the Lord. Actually, that first line is even tighter in the Greek: From God in Christ; that is who we are, what we are, where we are and why we are. An ordained person is, par excellence, what every Christian is: As Paul says later in the letter, you are not your own, you were bought with a price. God went out to buy a present for the world he loves so much; he chose you, wrapped you in the healing and cleansing life and death of his own Son, and now presents you to the world as a gift of his love, his wisdom. But when God clothes you with Christ you become a different person, a new person, in him, and all the failures and inadequacies of which we are all only too conscious are taken up in his life. Not many of you, says Paul, were wise or powerful or noble by human standards; but God chose the foolish to shame the wise, the weak to shame the strong, the lowly to bring down the mighty. You might think Paul had been reading the Magnificat, and perhaps he had. From God in Christ; as you stand there, tonight or tomorrow, as you stand before your own congregation as a newly ordained deacon or priest, as you go to work on Monday morning, of course it matters that you have done your homework, read the books, passed the exams, learned how to be a pastor – but it matters far, far more that you are in Christ, that you will speak of Christ, that you will live Christ before the world, Christ who became for us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. If that were not true, we all ought to run away and hide our heads in a hole for very shame at the thought that we could dare to speak truly of the living God, of the loving Christ, or to live his life before the watching world. There are therefore three things which grow out of this passage and this theme to which I want to urge you to give special attention as you come to ordination and as you grow in your new position in the days to come. They are very obvious but at times like this we need to say the obvious things so that we can then look one another in the eye hereafter and hold one another accountable to them. The first is the life of prayer, the prayer of the people who are from God in Christ. There are more helps to prayer available now than ever before – some of them, indeed, written by Bishop John! Different patterns and styles of prayer are appropriate for different people at different times of their lives, and you must constantly work at finding the right pattern for yourself. Again and again in my ministry I find myself, at the heart of the busy day with all its demands, going back in my heart and mind to the prayer of the early morning and drawing strength from it. But amid all the organisation and techniques, the one thing that is needful, as Jesus said to Martha, is to be rooted and grounded in Jesus himself: That takes time; time to ponder a passage from

the gospels until you become a character in the story, following Jesus and listening to his words; time to stand again at the foot of the cross, or to walk again along the Emmaus Road, to hear the words which say, Foolish ones, slow of heart to believe – was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer and enter his glory? It may well lead you into one of those patterns of prayer that our Eastern cousins know so well, whether the Jesus prayer, repeated over and over until it becomes a bubbling well of the life and love of Jesus deep within you, or some other. Of course prayer is often difficult. God sometimes withdraws from us so that we can go looking for him the more eagerly. Again and again other concerns crowd in and threaten to disrupt our praying. That is to be expected. It gets harder, not easier, but part of the trick is to recognise that the difficulties are themselves a sign that prayer matters, that the enemy knows if he can prevent you from being rooted and grounded in Christ and discovering the true wisdom in him he will have neutralized your effectiveness. One God, the Father, from whom are all things and we to him; one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and we through him. From God in Christ: Along with prayer goes the life of holiness. Paul writes that Jesus the Messiah has become for us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. Big, clunky words like three enormous verbal elephants guarding a central truth. I cannot stress just how important this is. The pressure will constantly be on you, precisely because you rightly want to get alongside your people, to be incarnational in your ministry, to be on all fours with where folk are at – the pressure will constantly be on you to compromise the standards which genuinely reflect and embody the life of Christ. It happens in little things, matters of what we say and how we say it, our body language and facial language, our little choices about how we spend our time, what we make a priority in small things as in large. This is where a good spiritual director can really help enormously. But it also matters, of course but again it needs saying in the larger matters, too. The big three issues that face us all – money, sex and power – pose major problems and raise major questions. I have seen clergy make major shipwreck in these areas, and the truly worrying thing about that is that they had clearly managed to deceive themselves very thoroughly into thinking that God in Christ was not only condoning but actually encouraging their misbehaviour. You owe it to yourself; you owe it to the church; you owe it to God. Live by that truth; live in that truth; remember once again that you were bought with a price. Third and lastly, remember what this is all for. God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is lowly in the world, including you and me, to shame the high and mighty. We are to be the upside-down people, or rather the right-way-up people, whose lives from God in Christ are a cheerful standing question mark, challenge, rebuke, warning and invitation to the rest of the world. Thank God that we have learned in our day, or at least are learning, that the mission of the church is not to save souls for a disembodied heaven, nor simply to improve the lot of people on the present earth, but to aim at something larger which transcends both. If you think simply of souls ending up in a disembodied heaven, you will anticipate that in the present by a life of quietist, detached spirituality, denying all those things that speak of the universe of space, time and matter. That is Platonism, not Christianity. If you think simply of helping people to improve their social, cultural and societal lot in the present world, you have nothing to say, as John Sentamu recently pointed out, when people have everything going for them materially and yet have no idea about the meaning of it all. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. They go together, because together they anticipate that time when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. The task of articulating and expounding the Christian world view remains central to our calling. At the moment the politicians and economists exercise power in one particular way, and our weak strength must put them to shame. The task living together, and witnessing to the world, a different kind of power and glory remains central to our calling. At the moment the great ones of the earth have no idea where true greatness lies, and our humble nobility must put them to shame; the task of living in a genuinely counter-cultural way not simply a Christian version of inverted snobbery! Like prayer and holiness, the mission of the church thus grows directly out of the fresh wisdom of 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, proclaiming and living Christ crucified, a stumbling block and folly to others, but to us Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. You are from God in Christ; that is your glory and the centre of your calling. Go to your tasks with gladness and singleness of heart. Our faith and our calling, and in particular the calling to which you are

now saying Yes, does not rest in human wisdom, but in the power of God.

Chapter 8 : Who is This "Son of God"? - Topical Studies

I liked Martin Hengel's books "The `Hellenization' of Judea" and "The Son of God". While I disagree with Hengel (a Christian theologian) on a number of points, I found the books interesting and stimulating.

Chapter 9 : The Crucified God - Episode 37 / Cross Connection: Hope Channel | Christian Television

The great theologian Martin Hengel has done a great service with this book. First, it contains a wealth of information about the way in which crucifixion was used in the ancient worldRoman, Greek, Barbarian, and even among the Jewish Hasmonean dynasty.