

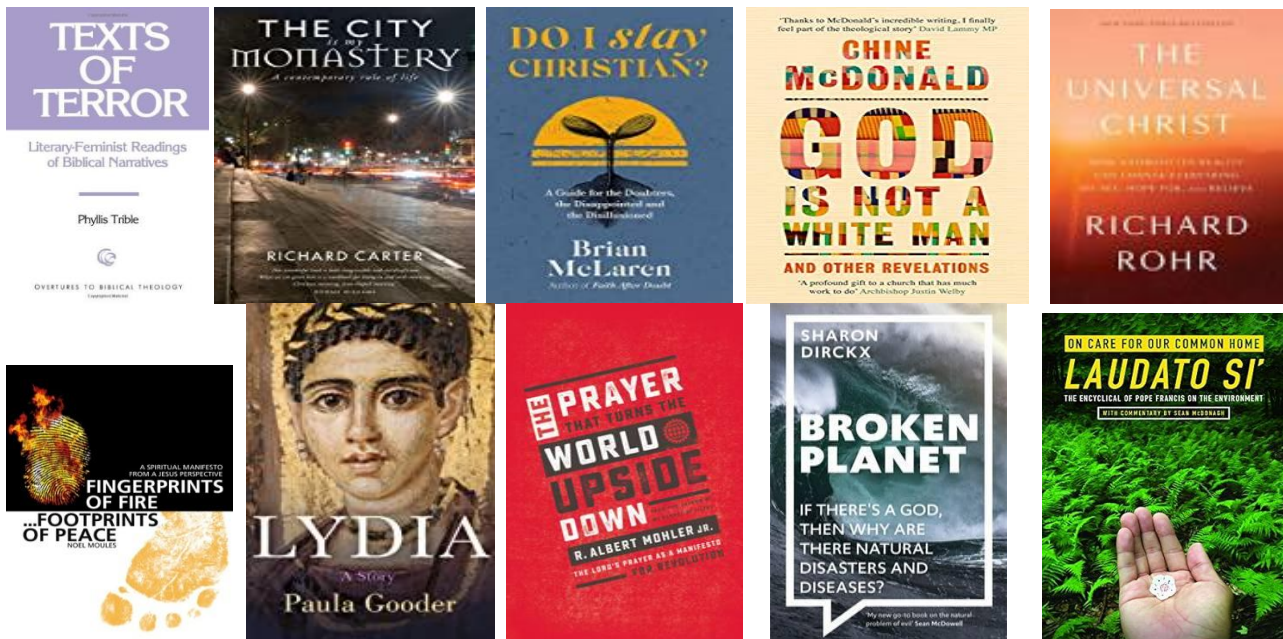
## Northampton Ecumenical Reading Group



Our Group began in 2008 as a result of a conversation I had with Canon David Wiseman. Very much like David, many of our members have either moved out of Northampton on retirement or as a result of ministerial obligations have had to leave the group to live and minister in another part of the country. To some extent, we are a fluid group.

All of our members are Christians but all are not church employees. We come from diverse denominational strands and cultural backgrounds but share a deep interest in reading and learning from the perspectives of others.

We've read and discussed a wide range of books in the 15 years since we began including the following:



We are currently reading *Coming to faith through Darwin* by edited by Denis Alexander and Alister McGrath and will be sharing our point of views on Wednesday 6 December, no doubt complemented with mince pies along with tea/coffee!

We've had writers come to talk about their books, for example: Andrew Graystone - *Faith Hope and Mischief*, Ted Hale: *Four Part Harmony*. We have even had published writers who are members of the group talk about our publications: Stuart Jenkins: *Like John* (Kindle) and I spoke about one of mine: *Challenges of Pentecostal Theology in the 21st Century*.

The benefits of the group are as varied as the members. For example:

*Andrew Halliwell says "The echo chamber effect exists as much in our own reading habits as with social media. With the ecumenical reading group I find myself reading and appreciate books and perspectives that I would otherwise been very unlikely to pick up, which helps keep the spiritual journey fresh and exciting."*

Allison Shefford says, " I joined the group as I have a passion for reading particularly Christian books. It has been a great experience to hear different perspectives and views on various books that differ from my own. My experience so far of the group is it is friendly full of laughter, discussion, and thought-provoking statements. There is a freedom to share your thoughts without judgement and criticism. We are from different denominations, cultural backgrounds, and ages and yet there is a sense of unity but not uniformity. I'm sure we would say we can agree to disagree well based on good relationships within the group."

In addition to the enrichment we gain from reading books and discussing them with like-minded people, we also have privileged opportunities to organised and/or attended events related to our interests and concerns. The Northampton Globe Project, for example, originated in 2016 in our reading group.



Our reconstruction of William Carey's leather globe



We commissioned the leather craftsman and Quaker, Theo Sturge to make the globe in response to the crisis of refugees fleeing from Syria. We were disturbed by much that was negative and inhospitable in our media. We aimed to use the globe as a conversation starter about the current global issues. Shoemaker Carey had crafted his original globe for the children he taught in his cottage school in Moulton. He used different coloured leathers for different land masses and wanted his pupils to be as excited about the world in all its diversity as he was. We were thinking of all the shoe leather worn out by fleeing refugees. We were rejoicing at the fact that there was no writing and no borders on our globe. We know that God spoke to Carey through his globe (and the world map he made). His great grandson when visiting his cottage declared, 'This was his Troas!' For a year we travelled around, wherever we were invited, sometimes in pairs or in a larger group, speaking to church groups, inter-faith ones, secular groups and leading discussions about hopes and fears. It even went to conferences, council meetings and refugee meetings. It still travels around from time to time but lives at Moulton.

Margaret Williams

I joined the reading group in 2013 and the book we read then was 'The Narrow Road to the Deep North' by Richard Flanagan. In 2016, I organised a garden party and invited our Reading Group to join a small ecumenical group to which I belonged to raise additional funds to use with the Governmental Scheme to bring an Afghan Refugee family to Northampton where we would become a Safe Haven for them. We organised activities at Great Houghton Village Hall to enable them to feel welcome by local community.

Aideen Forgaty

If you would like to join our group, please feel welcome to contact me: [phyllis.thompson2@btinternet.com](mailto:phyllis.thompson2@btinternet.com)

We meet over lunch every other month as our diaries allow with three intentional expectations:

- to share our varied Christian/theological views in stimulating discussions on a book chosen by the group;
- to learn from each other's perspectives through respectful, joyful and meaningful conversations and reflections;
- to broaden and challenge our theological thinking and practice of ministry.

Rev Phyllis Thompson

On behalf of the Group

Written for CT Shire & Soke Executive ZOOM Meeting on 21st November