

2019 Reads List
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Happy New Year to all. Here is a condensed, annotated list from my readings in 2019.

Two requests:

Please pass this this reads list on to whomever you wish.

Please send me titles you benefited from and/or enjoyed recently. I am always on the hunt for good reads. I am always interested in novels, memoirs and historical titles....Thanks!

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Epiphany 2020

The Narnian Alan Jacobs

This is a newer biography on C. S. Lewis. The author wondered if we really needed yet another CSL biography. I am glad we do. Jacobs takes on earlier biographies of CSL that seem to have glossed over the quirky or edgy parts of CSL's personality. Jacob's gleaning of CSL's brilliance is stimulating. This is one of my favorite reads of the year. (This past year I read three books by Jacobs and enjoyed his keen perspective, timely wit, grasp of the subject, and overall writing style. I commend him to you.)

Subversive Sabbath A. J. Swoboda

This is about as comprehensive treaties on this subject I've read. Swoboda provides a thought-provoking and extensive look at the God created practice of Sabbath and the ripple effects of the sabbath practice throughout all of life and creation. I have a number of dog-eared pages that require further reflection. Well worth the read.

Embracing Contemplation Ed. John Coe and Kyle Strobel

Theologically, both from a biblical framework and an applied response, this is a must read book. Phrases such as "spiritual formation" and "contemplative spirituality" have become buzz words and more main stream in Evangelical/protestant vernacular in recent decades. There are a plethora of books out there on these subjects. I have often found many works sparse on Biblically ground. Often I am left with much inner reflection that takes me in on myself rather that toward Christ. This can breed a very self-absorbed, experienced-based, and even moralistic spirituality. Coe and Strobel gather a series of articles that seek to ground contemplation biblically and as such, in a Trinitarian and Christocentric reality. Numerous authors help us see that contemplation is a biblical norm - it is a natural outflow of Christ's abiding presence in us. Further, it is not self-induced - yet another item I am "to do" dutifully. Even if you think "contemplation" is "Eastern" or "New Age," I encourage you to read this book.

Pastor Paul: Nurturing A Culture of Christofornity in the Church Scot McNight

“The pastor is to nurture a culture of Christofornity.” With that opening chapter charge, the author looks at Paul’s pastoral theology and practice. The first chapter describes the ingredients for creating culture. The remainder of the book looks at various cultural values Paul aimed to see shaped in the local churches he planted and shepherded. As in all books, read this with critical eyes. McNight seems to get on tangents at times, becoming wordy when he does so.

Reformation Anglicanism ed. Ashley Null and John W. Yates III

During the Reformation on Continental Europe under such well known names of Luther and Calvin, a reformation was concurrently happening in England. Brilliant minds set ablaze by the Word and early church writers were in line theologically and biblically with what God was doing in other parts of the church. This short book looks at the theological moorings of the English reformers (Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Sola Deo Gloria) and how it set the Anglican church off on solid ground.

The Contemplative Response: Leadership and Ministry in a Distracted Culture Ian Crowley

This is a classic example of a book chocked full of worthy counsel yet too often leaves me to myself to make it all happen. I would have liked for the book to been expressed in a much clearer gospel grammar (God is the subject, his past, present and future work is the verb and all creation is the object responsive to God’s work). A gospel principle is to not cast others back upon themselves in life struggles or even desires to mature. The tone of “you need to...” are too often in the text. *That being said*, the Spirit used several sections of this book significantly in my own present response to God’s work in me. I have gone back to a couple of the short chapters again and again. This is a helpful book, but please read it with gospel oriented spectacles. I am grateful to TH for this book having been put in my hands.

The Book of Common Prayer: A Biography Alan Jacobs

(This title is part of Princeton University Press’ “Lives of Great Religious Books” Series). I had no idea. I first held an Anglican Book of Common Prayer as a 21 year old in the old St. Andrews Church on Nathan Road in Tsim Tsa Tsui, Hong Kong. I was intrigued but had insufficient church (or faith) history to have any idea what the book or the liturgy of the service was all about. In following the history of the Book of Common prayer one follows the history of the Church of England - Anglicanism. The brilliance of Thomas Cranmer is reflected in the prayers called Collects. Cranmer crams such biblical and theological weight into such succinct and comprehensible short prayers. Jacobs offers a masterful and engaging look at what was going on in England during the reformation and how it has evolved in the centuries since. Thanks to NM for this gift.

The Remarkable Ordinary: How to Stop, Look and Listen to Life Fredrick Buechner

Another short book full of an author’s life of perspective around the narrative of one’s life. Following arcs of his own narrative, he counsels for the place of plot twists and tragedy and tension in our own lives. We are encouraged to slow down and pay attention to the plot lines of our own lives and those lives around us.

For Fun Reads

The Pleasure of Reading in an Age of Distraction Alan Jacobs

Jacobs argues to not read books that we think we “should” read, but read based on whim - read what gives you pleasure and do so unapologetically. The book is written creatively as a single chapter, beginning to end, winding over hills and dales of various topics related to reading, the guilt of reading, the joy of reading, technology and reading, all things reading related. It is a fun ramble with Jacob’s wit sprinkled throughout. Of course this opinion from a lover of reading.....

Hannah Coulteir Wendell Berry

A beautiful, lovely novel of fictitious Hannah Coulteir’s reflections back over her long life in rural Ohio River country. As many things Berry, written with a poet’s eye. A lovely read. Thank you AS for this thoughtful gift.

Gospel According to Tolkien Ralph Woods

Two people were significantly influential in C. S. Lewis’ conversion: C. K. Chesterton and J. R. R. Tolkien. This book dissects the virtues that underlay Tolkien’s writings and how they were manifested in his colorful characters and striking plot lines. It’s occasionally a little wordy, yet for the LOR and Hobbit fan, there are gems sprinkled throughout. Tolkien was another brilliant mind who was convinced the truth is best expressed in mythological story and without the need for forced, overtly Christian statements.

Where Rivers Change Direction Mark Spragg

This memoir is beautifully written in the context of the expansive horizon of Wyoming where the author grew up on a Dude Ranch. He wonderfully describes the beauty and wonders of creation. Yet ranch life is a harsh life and his narrative soon takes equally harsh turns around older workers numbed by alcohol. What began as a boy’s life of wonder is eventually clouded during the early manhood years of not being influenced well. This book has been appropriately lauded for its lyrical style and yet the end of the story is a sadly unredeemed one.