



Annual Book Review 2013

by **Jim Osman**
Pastor/Teacher

Kootenai Community Church
kootenaichurch.org

It is time for my annual pre-summer book review and suggested reading list. A wise mentor once told me that a man is the product of the books he reads and the people he associates with. Through reading we associate with great men and women of the past and present as we spend time with them through the books they write. What type of company do you keep?

Every year I publish a review of my past readings in hopes of encouraging you to pick up and enjoy some good company during the coming year. The summer months are upon us and I trust that they will bring opportunity to imbibe deeply in some good books! So if you are looking for some suggestions of books to read (and one to avoid), I offer the following from my own list of completed readings from the past twelve months.

Theology

The Trinity by Loraine Boettner is a quick, easy read on a deep point of theology. It is a simple, straightforward outline of the doctrine of the Trinity presented in a very readable format. I could not find this book on Amazon.com and suspect that it was originally published as part of his larger work, ***Studies in Theology***. You should be able to find it in eBook format for relatively cheap, if not free.

The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ (Crossway, 148 pgs.) by Bruce Ware is a great, readable book on the humanity of Christ Jesus. Some particularly good chapters explain the relationship between Christ's two natures and the reality of His human temptation. Questions are included at the end of each chapter to prompt further discussion or reflection. Excellent!

No matter what your view of the end times may be, you will benefit from having ***Revelation 20 and the Millennial Debate*** by Matthew Waymeyer (Kress Christian Publications, 115 pgs.) on your shelf. Waymeyer rightly says that a proper interpretation of Revelation 20 is the determinative factor in evaluating different views on the end times.

The book reads like a syllabus outline of a class on the subject. That, in fact, is its strength. Though he argues for a premillennial interpretation of Revelation 20, Waymeyer summarizes the arguments and counterarguments for the various millennial positions in a very thorough and concise way. Even those who disagree with his conclusion (**which I do not**) will benefit from his work on this subject. Detailed exegesis of various texts is included in the footnotes, which are extensive and helpful.

The Complete Works of John Owen, Vol. 1

A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ—God and Man: with the Infinite Wisdom, Love, and Power of God in the Contrivance and Constitution Thereof; as also, of the Grounds and Reasons of His Incarnation; the Nature of His Ministry in Heaven; the Present State of the Church Above Thereon; and the Use of His Person in Religion: with an Account and Vindication of the Honor, Worship, Faith, Love, and Obedience Due Unto Him, In and From the Church. Yes, that is actually the title of a work written by John Owen in 1679 (272 pgs.) on the mystery of the incarnation and the wisdom of God demonstrated in that glorious mystery. The title alone is longer and contains more doctrine than most Christian books published today. This is an excellent work on the mystery of the two natures joined in one Person—the Lord Jesus Christ. Not for the faint of heart or anyone desiring an easy read.

As a follow-up (topically) to the previous book, Owen wrote ***Meditations and Discourses on The Glory of Christ, in his Person, Office, and Grace*** (141 pgs.).¹ Written in 1684, this work goes on to unfold, in very practical ways, the implications of the glory of Christ, and contains a practical section of meditations on the glory of Heaven and what awaits the believer. Very encouraging.

In a subsequent book titled ***Meditations and Discourses Concerning the Glory of Christ Applied Unto Unconverted Sinners and Saints Under Spiritual Decays*** (43 pgs.), Owen does a great job of prescribing means of grace to help the spiritually apathetic overcome the decays of their spiritual vigor and passions. Like a trained

¹ All the works by John Owen listed in this section are in Volume 1 of *The Works of John Owen*.

doctor, Owen diagnoses the problem, points to some potential causes, then shows from Scripture the remedy applied by the Spirit of God.

Finally, this first volume contains a **Lesser Catechism** and a **Greater Catechism**, written by Owen for use during his visitations with families in his church (30 pgs.).

Apologetics

I have long enjoyed the ministry of Greg Koukl and his presuppositional approach to Christian apologetics. Some years ago I listened to his audio series titled *Tactics in Defending The Faith*. I have gleaned much from listening to his weekly three-hour radio program, Stand To Reason.² When I found out that Koukl was releasing a book on his tactics, I knew that it would be apologetic gold. Indeed it is! ***Tactics: A Game Plan For Discussing Your Christian Convictions*** by Greg Koukl (Zondervan, 208 pgs.) is worth its weight in gold.

In this book you'll learn about the Columbo Tactic (named after the famous TV detective) and how to use it when confronting challengers. You'll learn some rules of logic and suggestions on how to identify faulty reasoning, stop challengers in their tracks, and stay in control of a conversation. This book is Basic Training for the Christian apologist! If you like apologetics, you will love this book.

A must-read for this year is a presuppositional apologetics primer by Dr. Jason Lisle titled ***The Ultimate Proof of Creation*** (Master Books, 254 pgs.). Dr. Lisle uses a presuppositional approach to defending the Christian worldview against those who deny Christian truth. He shows that every form of unbelief and every non-biblical worldview must presuppose truths borrowed from a Christian worldview in order to argue against a Christian worldview. All

² <http://www.str.org>

other worldviews must ultimately contradict themselves or be logically inconsistent.

This very accessible and engaging book contains chapters on the nature of evidence, the role of worldviews in interpreting evidence, and how to reason with an evolutionist. For those who want an introduction to the laws of logic and identifying logical fallacies, it also contains two very thorough and readable chapters on that subject. Highly recommended!

Biographical

The 40th Anniversary Edition of ***Through Gates of Splendor*** by Elisabeth Elliot (Living Books, 272 pgs.) contains a special second epilogue by the author, giving a perspective on the memorable events that only forty years can offer. This is the story of the lives, mission, and martyrdom of five missionaries (Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, Roger Youderian, Pete Flemming, and Ed McCully) who worked to bring the gospel to the “Auca”³ people of Ecuador. It is a fascinating and inspiring account of men who loved Christ with their very lives.

A fitting sequel is ***Unmarked Memories: Five Friends Buried in the Jungle of Ecuador*** by Frank and Marie Drown (Avant Ministries, 76 pgs.). Frank Drown was serving as a missionary in Ecuador when the Waodanis killed Nate Saint and the others. Frank personally knew both Nate Saint and Roger Youderian and was part of the search party that discovered the bodies of four out of the five missionaries. He was there to dig their graves and returned to tell the surviving widows of their husbands' fate. This is a first-person account of those nights spent in the jungle while searching for the missionaries and trying to piece together the details of the

³ After the “Aucas” were reached with the gospel they learned that the word “Auca” is a Quichua word meaning “naked.” That word is no longer used. They are now referred to as the Waodani, which means “the people.”

tragedy.

God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (**Genesis 3:18**). I thought of that verse often while reading ***Alone: The Classic Polar Adventure*** by Admiral Richard E. Byrd (Island Press, 300 pgs.). Admiral Byrd spent a winter on the Antarctic continent, taking daily weather readings from his small observation shack called “Advance Base.” This tale of survival in such an unbelievably harsh environment will captivate you. The perseverance and will to survive will inspire you as much as the tale of Shackleton's enterprise. Most interesting are Byrd's observations on his state of mind and soul while isolated from nearly all human contact. The book concludes with a short biography of Byrd's life, accomplishments and contributions to both polar exploration and aviation. I recommend this book for leisure reading.

The third in a series of five books covering figures from church history, ***Courage and Conviction*** (CF4K, 256 pgs.), covers the Reformation era. Each chapter, written as a narrative, covers significant events in the life of one particular character. John Calvin, Erasmus, Martin Luther, Menno Simons (Mennonites), Thomas Cranmer, John Knox, William Bradford, and many more are featured in this volume. This *History Lives* series is geared for young teenagers and intended to introduce them to pivotal characters from church history, but they are fun reads for adults as well.

Having decided to read the works of John Owen, I tackled a great biographical work on Owen by Sinclair Ferguson titled ***John Owen on the Christian Life*** (Banner of Truth Trust, 281 pgs.). This book gives a brief biography of Owen, but focuses more on the development and impact of his Puritan theology. Drawing from Owen's many published works, Ferguson provides a helpful outline of his theology, including summaries

and quotations of some of his most influential writings. These writings include works on mortification, perseverance, and Owen's eight-volume commentary on Hebrews which touches on the subject of apostasy. A very beneficial book if you are wanting to understand Puritan theologian John Owen without reading the sixteen intimidating small-print volumes of his writings.

Leadership

Incarnate Leadership: 5 Leadership Lessons from the Life of Jesus by Bill Robinson (Zondervan, 122 pgs.) is a simple, straightforward, and very practical book on the leadership style of Jesus. With an emphasis on *servant leadership*, a paradoxical concept in the eyes of the world, Robinson offers a theologically driven look at leadership derived from what we see in the incarnation of Jesus. This excellent little book on leadership will challenge and refresh you.

Miscellaneous

With two children in my house in their teens and two more on their way, I figured it was finally time to read ***I Kissed Dating Goodbye*** by Joshua Harris (Multnomah, 218 pgs.). This is a well-written and candid book about the dangers and disasters of the "dating try-before-you-buy" culture that has crept into the church. It offers a God-centered, gospel-driven approach to preparing for marriage and for dealing with the opposite sex. I expected a screed against dating, but was pleasantly surprised to read a book about purity, character development, and a God-centered approach to marriage preparation. Recommended for anyone with children or those preparing for marriage.

I have long believed that America is a nation under the judgment of God as described in Romans 1. Reading ***Can God Bless America?*** by John MacArthur (W

Publishing Group, 97 pgs.) the day after the 2012 Presidential election only served to confirm that belief. The entire book can be summed up in this one statement from the introduction: "*Scripture is clear that a wholesale spiritual renewal, brought about through the clear and persuasive preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, is the sole pathway to divine blessing. What is needed is not merely moral reform, but spiritual regeneration. And unless this occurs on a widespread scale that deeply impacts all of society, we will continue to forfeit the true blessings of God for our nation.*" Through the exposition of some clear passages of Scripture, MacArthur shows the biblical path to national blessing – repentance and faith.

Waste Of Time

Yes, I have started a new category of books for this newsletter — those that are a "waste of time." The first book to receive this dubious honor is ***Epic*** by John Eldredge (Thomas Nelson, 104 pgs.). In ***Epic***, it appears that Eldredge is trying to communicate the gospel in a compelling way by attempting to show that God is telling a story and we are all part of that story. Relying more heavily on the plot lines of popular films and fiction than he does on Scripture, Eldredge tries to show that we were all created to be part of God's "epic" tale.

The book seems intended to whet our appetite for "something more," which we are supposed to find in the gospel. However, Eldredge fails to communicate enough of the gospel for anyone to actually get saved. His presentation of our sin problem is weak at best. He tells us that we should choose life and that redemption is possible, but he never gets to the heart of the gospel. Nor does he mention repentance, or faith, or the reason Jesus died on the cross. Readers are left knowing that God wants them to be part of His story, but are given no idea how that

actually happens. If we are to evaluate Eldredge's understanding of the gospel from this one attempt to communicate it, we are left wondering if he even knows what it is.

John Trapp once said, "*As water tastes of the soil it runs through, so does the soul taste of the authors that a man reads.*" I know you must be looking forward to summer. With all that cries out for your attention, don't forget to give proper attention to reading. Read widely and read wisely. Above all, don't forget to read your Bible! That is the most important book of all.

Without Wax -

