



Annual Book Review 2014

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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, in some cases, a couple to avoid—offer the following from my own list of completed readings from the past twelve months.

Theology

If you want to be pistol-whipped, then read **Respectable Sins** by Jerry Bridges (Navpress, 181 pgs.). Bridges covers a list of sins that we Christians tend to tolerate in our lives. Though we may not indulge in the “biggies,” we tend to overlook things in our lives which are still sin. Chapters deal with ungodliness, anxiety, discontentment, ungratefulness, pride, selfishness, and many others. Those searching chapters will make you realize just how much of a sinner you really are! Thankfully, Bridges

offers several chapters explaining the process of sanctification and how we are to deal with our sin. A convicting book that I highly recommend.

Christ's Prophetic Plans: A Futuristic Premillennial Primer (Moody Publishers, 204 pgs.), edited by John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, is a great primer on end-times theology. The chapters describing dispensational distinctives are helpful in identifying the differences between end-times views. The entire book is *excellent*, but the three best chapters are those that deal with Revelation 20, Calvinism and Premillennialism, and the millennial view of the early church. I do wish more time was given to the difference between “historic premillennialism” and “futuristic premillennialism,” but even with that weakness, the book is a great read.

Strange Fire by John MacArthur (Nelson Books, 312 pgs.) is probably the **best** book I read this year. This is a critique of the *excesses* of the modern Charismatic movement, focused specifically on the New Apostolic Reformation and Word of Faith teachers. MacArthur addresses the foundational beliefs of the modern Charismatic movement and shows that the excesses flow quite naturally from those foundational beliefs. The visible false teachers like Benny Hinn, Rick Joyner, and Bill Johnson are not the fringe of the Charismatic movement. They are, in fact, the mainstream.

MacArthur is very careful not to paint all Charismatics with the same broad brush. He acknowledges that men like John Piper, D.A. Carson, and Wayne Grudem, although maintaining a continuationist¹ position, are not in the same camp as the egregious false teachers which characterize the movement as a whole. An open letter to those who are his “continuationist friends” closes out the book. This book is a well written, theologically precise clarion call to the Church. Excellent!

Isaiah's Messiah by Victor Buksbazen (The Friends Of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 76 pgs.) is a book I would give to a Jew who wants to understand why Christians believe Jesus is the Messiah. This book only covers Isaiah 53 and shows how the only possible way this passage can be fulfilled is in Jesus of Nazareth. The first chapter provides a helpful and interesting historical overview of how this section of Isaiah's prophecy has been understood by Jews.

The Complete Works of John Owen, Vol. 2-

[This is most certainly a “Puritan” title] ***Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Each Person Distinctly, In Love, Grace, and Consolation; or, The Saints' Fellowship With The Father, Son, And Holy Ghost Unfolded*** (Banner Of Truth Trust, 276 pgs.). When a Puritan author writes on a subject, there is little left to be said.

This work by Owen is divided into three sections, each dealing with the communion we enjoy with that particular Person of the Trinity. Owen explains the basis of our communion and how it is that each Person is involved in making Himself known to us in both Scripture and experience. Owen does not make for easy reading, but he is always profitable reading.

¹ A **continuationist** is someone who believes that all the sign gifts of the New Testament era (tongues, miracles, healings, etc) continue and are still operational in the church today. A **cessationist** is one who believes that the miraculous sign gifts have ceased but the other spiritual gifts are still in operation.

Apologetics

I have some mixed emotions about ***What's So Great About Christianity*** by Dinesh D'Souza (Tyndale House, 309 pgs.). This is a response to the anti-theistic claims and charges of the “New Atheists” who have made atheism all the rage recently. D'Souza tackles some of the charges and critiques of Christianity raised by modern atheists.

As a defense of “mere Christianity”² it is adequate to the task. However, if you are searching for an apologetic resource that demonstrates depth of research and thinking on any one topic, this book will disappoint. D'Souza handles too many subjects to make any real contribution to any of them. If you are looking for a resource that is a robust defense of a more theologically precise understanding of Christian doctrine, you will not find it here. This, in fact, is what gives me the mixed emotions regarding this book. D'Souza makes some good points and uses some standard apologetic arguments, but he seems very quick to concede ground to atheists, which only serves to undermine the very foundations of the faith he purports to try to defend. For instance, on more than one occasion, D'Souza defends “old earth” cosmology, noting that one's belief in the historicity of Genesis is not at all important. I take issue with that. Further, he even argues that evolution (in the Darwinian sense of the term) is true and is responsible for the world in which we live. This is a mental and philosophical disconnect that I simply cannot understand. Once this ground is conceded to the atheist, it seems that one is left with nothing to fight for at all.

On the other hand, D'Souza does offer quite a bit that is helpful and informative. The chapters detailing the positive benefits of Christianity on the western world are well worth reading. Chapters on limited government, human dignity, the progress of reason, and the theological roots of scientific inquiry are worth the price of the book (if you can find it on sale).

² The term “mere Christianity” is used to describe the Christian religion in its most basic and nominal form.

The bottom line: there are better books to read on the subjects covered in this book.

The Same Sex Controversy by James R. White and Jeffrey D. Niell (Bethany House, 248 pgs.) offers a defense and clarification of the Bible's message regarding homosexuality. There are a number of authors in recent years who have tried to argue that the Bible does not condemn the homosexual lifestyle. This book looks at all the relevant verses in the Scriptures and answers the arguments of pro-homosexual apologists regarding those verses. The book contains two very helpful chapters on the Leviticus holiness code and its application for today. It is written in a scholarly and loving fashion and concludes with a pastoral appeal to those who struggle with same-sex attraction. Excellent.

(As a side note: You should be equipping yourself to answer some of these arguments and defend the faith against this present cultural onslaught. Christians need to be able to think and speak biblically regarding these issues. This is the arena where pressure is being leveraged against the church of Christ, and it is not going to go away anytime soon.)

Biographical

Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife (Simon & Schuster, 208 pgs.) tells the story of Dr. Eben Alexander's near death experience (NDE) in 2010. I read this book for the sole purpose of writing a review of it which will be published in the June and July issues of the *Kootenai Communicator*. It will also be available at our website. My summary: complete balderdash.

Leadership/Preaching

Simplicity In Preaching by J.C. Ryle is more of a brochure than a book (Banner of Truth, 22 pgs.). Every preacher knows that his preaching and teaching should be marked by simplicity and clarity. Though containing nothing new, this book was a refreshing reminder of some things to keep in mind when

preparing sermons. An excellent book for young, aspiring preachers and a good reminder to those who are...well...not so young.

History

After hearing Robert Tracy McKenzie interviewed on Al Mohler's podcast, I knew I had to buy and read his book, **The First Thanksgiving: What the Real Story Tells Us About Loving God and Learning From History** (Intervarsity Press, 219 pgs.). I was not disappointed. The book does two things, either of which would make this book well worth buying.

First, McKenzie teaches us how we should view and treat history and historical figures, offering a thoroughly Christian way to view history. He also warns against some errors commonly made when we read and study history.

Second, the book teaches us a lot about the pilgrims and the celebration of the first Thanksgiving. The value of the book is McKenzie's ability to understand the pilgrims, not in light of our own culture and worldview, but **their** culture and worldview.

The book strips away all the myths about the pilgrims, the Mayflower, the Puritans, Indians, and the first Thanksgiving that we learned in school.

If you read the book, your understanding of history will be corrected, and your appreciation of the pilgrims will be increased - though not like you might expect!

Miscellaneous

You will certainly learn a lot from **How Capitalism Saved America** by Thomas J. DiLorenzo (Crown Forum, 256 pgs.) as promised by the subtitle, **The Untold History of Our Country From The Pilgrims To The Present**. This book contains everything you should have learned in high school but didn't. You will be amazed at the true history of the Great Depression and the New Deal and you will be angry that nobody ever told you the truth

about those nasty “robber barons.” I love this book!

Control: Exposing The Truth About Guns by Glenn Beck (Simon and Schuster, 189 pgs.) is a quick and easy read. This is a thoroughly footnoted answer to the gun control push so popular among leftists in the wake of recent school shootings. It is filled with concise and clear argumentation and lots of statistics and information about the meaning and intent of the Second Amendment.

Audiobooks

From Pearl Harbor To Calvary by Mitsuo Fuchida (eChristian Books, 96 pgs.) is available in audiobook format for only \$6³, and it is worth every penny! This the story of the captain of the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service who led the first wave of attack on Pearl Harbor. A few years after that event, Fuchida not only came to Christ, but he returned to Japan to evangelize his own people. I won't ruin the details for you here, but you will be amazed at the providence of God. The audiobook version I listened to included two interviews with people instrumental in this man's conversion and ministry.

The Rape Of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II by Iris Chang (2 hrs., 9 mins.) is not for the faint of heart. This book recounts the atrocities of the Japanese upon the citizens of Nanking, China, during World War II. Did you know that more people died at the hands of the Japanese during that one siege of Nanking than died in the bombings of both Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined? This book also examines the lasting horrors that men and women in China continue to live with even decades after the Japanese invasion. A grim reminder of man's depravity.⁴

Capitalism and Freedom by Milton Friedman (7 hrs.) is available in its entirety

online.⁵ Friedman is a brilliant economist. The book tackles the application of personal liberty and free market solutions to subjects like international trade, government interference in markets, and the public school system. Friedman doesn't necessarily offer solutions to **all** that ails us with our current issues, but he does deal with the principles that should guide our understanding of the role of government in economic affairs. A very engaging and thought-provoking listen.

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 -



3 <http://christianaudio.com/from-pearl-harbor-to-calvary-mitsuo-fuchida>. It is also available in paperback for \$4.99 at christianbook.com.

4 This audiobook is available for free from American Conservative University (acu.libsyn.com) in episodes 1026 & 1027.

5 <http://acu.libsyn.com/> Search the archives for episodes 1000-1005.