

## They Cast Their Nets in Galilee

William Alexander Percy (1885-1942)

They cast their nets in Galilee  
Just off the hills of brown;  
Such happy, simple fisher-folk,  
Before the Lord came down.

Contented, peaceful fishermen,  
Before they ever knew  
The peace of God that filled their hearts  
Brimful, and broke them too.

Young John who trimmed the flapping sail,  
Homeless, in Patmos died.  
Peter, who hauled the teeming net,  
Head down was crucified.

The peace of God, it is no peace,  
But strife closed in the sod.  
Yet, brothers, pray for but one thing—  
The marvelous peace of God.

## ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

### *In the Nick of Time*

#### Most Interesting Reading of 2020

Kevin T. Bauder

Lots of people produce recommended reading lists. Typically these are bibliographies of the books that the compiler found most useful. The lists are often labeled something like “Best Books of...” or “Best Books about...”

I do my list a bit differently: I give you a list of the reading that I found most interesting, even if it was completely useless. Furthermore, this reading might qualify as most interesting in various ways. Perhaps it was boring but particularly helpful. Perhaps it was useless but conspicuously funny. Perhaps it was so outstandingly bad as to become amusing.

What I’m saying is that my list is idiosyncratic. It is certainly *not* a list of recommended reading. You may find some of the books amusing or helpful, but you may find them tepid, off-putting, or even offensive. They are listed here only because I, and I alone, found them interesting. Read at your own risk, but here’s the first part of my list of “Most Interesting Books I Read During 2020.”

**Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica. Part I, Q 1–26*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. London: Burn, Gates, and Washburn, 1920. 366pp.**

While I had already read the McDermott abridgment of the *Summa*, I thought that this standard version would be worth sampling. In fact, it was easier to follow. The length of the entire *Summa Theologica* can be daunting, but it is broken down into manageable parts. Thomas is not difficult to read, but you do have to know *how* to read him: when he is asking a question and limiting it, when he is giving answers with which he will later disagree, and when he is giving his own answers. You must also catch his definitions and pay attention to the way he expands upon them. In this first volume Thomas deals with the doctrine of God. It is a worthy statement of classical theism.

**Bordewich, Fergus M. *The First Congress: How James Madison, George Washington, and a Group of Extraordinary Men Invented the Government*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017. 416pp.**

High school courses in American history teach that the US Constitution was worked out through a series of compromises—and that’s true as far as it goes. In this history Bordewich shows the competing interests fully at work,



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and he also sets them against a background affected by difficult travel, harsh weather, economic hardship, and competition between leading cities. I came away from this book marveling that the United States were able to adopt a constitution at all, let alone one that would endure for more than two centuries.

**Dolezal, James E.** *All That Is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism.* Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2017. 176pp.

Classical theism is the belief that God is simple, eternal, immutable, omniscient, and impassible. Present-day evangelical theologians are tripping over one another to find ways to attenuate this classical perspective. Dolezal resists this revisionism and offers a brief, readable defense of classical theism on both biblical and systematic grounds. This is a book that every pastor needs to read.

**Guyon, Jeanne.** *Autobiography of Madame Guyon.* London: Kegan Paul, 1898. 338pp.

The works of Mme. Guyon are often viewed as classics of devotional literature. I began reading her autobiography with high hopes for edification. What I found, however, is that the work is offensively Romanist in doctrine, absurdly self-absorbed in its perspective, and annoyingly whining in its tone. It may contain a spiritual insight here or there, but frankly this book undermined any confidence that I might have placed in Guyon's spiritual counsel. If I were publishing a list of "Most Annoying Books," Guyon's autobiography would have a place on it. I would rather read Edwards or Law for edification any day.

**Hare, Robert D.** *Without Conscience: The Disturbing World of the Psychopaths Among Us.* New York: Guilford Press, 1999. 236pp.

While I subscribe to biblical counseling, I also recognize a value in descriptions of behavior provided by careful observers. Hare has spent a career observing psychopaths; in fact, he was responsible for developing the standard instrument for detecting psychopathy. This book provides a useful definition and overview of psychopathic or sociopathic behavior. The author also speculates as to causes and treatments for psychopathy. Warning: this book contains factual descriptions of disturbing behavior that you may find offensive. I did. But the descriptions are necessary if the phenomenon is to be understood.

**Hayek, Friedrich A.** *The Constitution of Liberty.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. 688pp.

Hayek did not wish to be called a conservative, but he was nevertheless one of the three founders of the modern conservative intellectual movement. This work is not his best-known volume, and at nearly 700 pages it can seem

a bit intimidating. Granted, it is a manly book. Nevertheless, it is a valuable book, even a *very* valuable book. It is essentially a sustained argument against the totalitarian state and against the "planned economy" that leads to it. You've probably read *The Road to Serfdom* (and if not, why not?). If so, you really ought to read *The Constitution of Liberty*. Of the two, it is the greater book.

**Henry, Marie.** *The Secret Life of Hannah Whitall Smith.* Grand Rapids: Chosen/Zondervan, 1984. 186pp.

Hannah Whitall Smith was one of the founders and leading authors of the Keswick movement. She continues to be viewed as a leading devotional writer. Marie Henry sets out to produce a sympathetic biography of this perplexing woman. Along the way Henry provides evidence that is, or ought to be, devastating to Smith's standing as a Christian leader. Smith was a woman who was wrong in so many ways (her universalism, for example) that it is difficult to see why she should be ceded any level of spiritual authority. The book also provides interesting historical detail about two sons-in-law, Bertrand Russell and Bernard Berenson, both of whom became intellectual leaders of anti-Christianity.

**Kessler, Ronald.** *In the President's Secret Service: Behind the Scenes with the Agents in the Line of Fire and the Presidents They Protect.* New York: Crown Forum, 2010. 285pp.

This book is partly a history of the Secret Service. It is partly a description of the kind of lives that Secret Service agents are required to lead. It is partly a glimpse into the managerial culture that governs the Secret Service. It is partly a narrative of how various presidents and their families have used and related to the Secret Service. The result is that agents end up looking pretty good, the organizational culture of the service ends up looking pretty bad, and various protectees end up looking either good or bad. This book was both enjoyable and instructive. Let the reader beware: Kessler places human coarseness fully on display.

At this point we're about halfway through my list of most interesting reading from 2020. I'll wrap up the list in next week's *In the Nick of Time*. I've just noticed that this week's list contains no fiction, but I promise to correct that deficiency in the second installment.



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This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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