

Psalm 119*Isaac Watts (1674–1748)*

To thee, before the dawning light
 My gracious God, I pray;
 I meditate thy name by night,
 And keep thy law by day.

My spirit faints to see thy grace,
 Thy promise bears me up;
 And while salvation long delays,
 Thy word supports my hope.

Seven times a day I lift my hands,
 And pay my thanks to thee;
 Thy righteous providence demands
 Repeated praise from me.

When midnight darkness veils the skies,
 I call thy works to mind;
 My thoughts in warm devotion rise,
 And sweet acceptance find.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Most Interesting Reading of 2022, part 2

Kevin T. Bauder

This week I continue my list of the twenty most interesting books that I read during the past year. Remember, I choose to list these books for no other reason than that they held my attention. I found them to be good reads, for a variety of reasons. You may find them dull or worthless.

Letham, Robert. *The Holy Trinity*. Rev. ed. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013.

Theologically, the doctrine of the Trinity has been a major focus of the 21st Century. Letham's volume is a *tour de force* of Trinitarian theology. He approaches the topic biblically, historically, and systematically. He interacts extensively with contemporary theologians, both East and West, who have wrestled with the doctrine, and he defends Trinitarianism as it has been historically understood.

Lewis, C. S. *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*. New York: Harper, 1966.

During my first year of PhD studies I read through almost all of Lewis's work, much of which was difficult to obtain in those days. This particular volume is a collection of essays (and a transcription of a conversation) about fairy tales and fantastic literature. It also includes some of Lewis's shorter fantastic stories. I found the book helpful thirty years ago. I found it equally helpful on this re-read.

Mungons, Kevin, and Douglas Yeo. *Homer Rodeheaver and the Rise of the Gospel Music Industry*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois, 2021.

Kevin Mungons has long taken an interest in the gospel song era. He and his coauthor have produced an exceptional book about Homer Rodeheaver, Billy Sunday's right-hand man. The book is more than a biography. It gives a glimpse into the workings of bigtime evangelism during the early 20th Century. It also provides valuable insight into the development of the gospel music industry.



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Rubenstein, Richard E. *When Jesus Became God: The Struggle to Define Christianity During the Last Days of Rome.* New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999.

The author of this volume is a secular Jew whose field of expertise involves understanding conflict. Here he analyzes the Arian controversy *as a conflict* rather than for its theological value. The result is as good an overview as a non-theologian is likely to produce. In fact, it is better than most theologians would produce. The work is especially valuable for uncovering the ways in which social and political concerns worked to fuel the controversy. This is not a perfect book, but it is a very helpful and interesting book.

Tripp, Paul David. *Suffering: Gospel Hope When Life Doesn't Make Sense.* Wheaton: Crossway, 2018.

Plenty of books have been written about suffering. Tripp writes about facing the calamities that completely stop us and that redefine our lives. The author is one of the best known of biblical counselors, but the book came out of his own personal trial by fire. What Tripp offers is great counsel coupled with the kind of conviction and compassion that can be found only in one who has personally endured such experiences.

University of Chicago Editorial Staff. *But Can I Start a Sentence with "But"?* Chicago: University of Chicago, 2016.

Wouldn't it be great if a book of English grammar and style not only taught you how to keep the rules but how to break them well? That's exactly what this work does. It is produced by the editors of the famed *Chicago Manual of Style*, but it poses the question, "Would you set your hair on fire if CMOS said you should?" The authors take their work, but not themselves, seriously. The book has (no pun intended) *style*, meaning *panache*. It's also got a good bit of snark, and even a few laugh-out-loud moments.

Vance, J. D. *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir.* New York: Harper, 2018.

J. D. Vance is now a United States Senator. At the time he wrote *Hillbilly Elegy* he was a graduate of Ohio State University and Yale Law School. He grew up in a broken, blue-collar home, reared largely by his grandparents. They in turn were Southerners who had moved to Ohio seeking work during one of the migratory waves. Vance traces his family history within the larger context of hillbilly culture, using the narrative of his upbringing to examine the values perpetuated within this subset of American society. In spite of some pretty rough language I found this book to be a riveting exploration of Vance's native culture.

Wilkerson, Isabel. *The Warmth of Other Suns.* New York: Vintage/Random House, 2011.

The experiences narrated by Vance in *Hillbilly Elegy* are paralleled by those narrated by Wilkerson in *The Warmth of Other Suns*. The difference is that

Wilkerson writes about the Black experience during the Great Migration—the waves of Blacks who left the South for employment in the North. To the problems experienced by Vance's forebears, Blacks also endured the hardship of racial hatred. Wilkerson tells the tale beautifully, helping readers of all backgrounds toward a sympathetic understanding of this aspect of the Black experience. Wilkerson has written a book that is both great history and great literature.

Winship, Michael P. *Hot Protestants: A History of Puritanism in England and America.* New Haven: Yale, 2018.

By the expression "hot Protestants," Michael Winship means Puritans, defined broadly enough to include Separatists and even some Baptists. He narrates the story of Puritanism and explores the divisions that doomed it in a detailed yet engaging way. He offers as good an explanation as I've seen for how the Puritan movement arose and why it eventually died. If you can read only one book on Puritanism, it should probably be this one.

Wolfe, Tom. *The Right Stuff.* 2nd ed. New York: Farrar, Strous, and Giroux, 1979.

Tom Wolfe was an important figure in the New Journalism of the 60s and 70s—in fact, he was the writer who used that label as a title. The New Journalists dropped the façade of neutrality in their stories, often narrating factual (and sometimes semi-factual) events as if they were works of fiction. In *The Right Stuff*, Wolfe tells the story of the Mercury space program, and he tells it well. The book requires a warning about some of its language, but I learned a good bit of aviation history while reading it.

So those are the twenty titles that I found most interesting during 2022. They make up an eclectic batch. I've only just noticed that no works of fiction made the list this year except *Pilgrim's Progress*, which is not so much pure fiction as it is an allegory of the Christian life. But to be fair, my reading was preempted for some months by a bout of COVID, so I read less of everything.

You might like some of these books. On the other hand, you might not like any of them. I admit that my tastes are a bit idiosyncratic. Nevertheless, we praise what we enjoy, and I enjoyed reading these works. They were bright spots in my year.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and 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.
