

That Man Is Blest*Isaac Watts (1674–1748)*

That man is blest who, fearing God,
 from sin restrains his feet,
 who will not stand with wicked men,
 who shuns the scorners' seat.

Yea, blest is he who makes God's law
 his portion and delight,
 and meditates upon that law
 with gladness day and night.

That man is nourished like a tree
 set by the river's side;
 its leaf is green, its fruit is sure,
 and thus his works abide.

The wicked, like the driven chaff,
 are swept from off the land;
 they shall not gather with the just,
 nor in the judgment stand.

The LORD will guard the righteous well,
 their way to Him is known;
 the way of sinners, far from God,
 shall surely be o'erthrown.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

*In the Nick of Time***Most Interesting Reading of 2023, Part One***Kevin T. Bauder*

Every year at about this time I issue disclaimers. The disclaimers attach to a listing of the most interesting reading that I have completed over the preceding year. What the disclaimers state is that (1) interesting isn't necessarily the same thing as valuable, and (2) what interests me may not interest anybody else. In short, the following titles may indicate nothing more than my own idiosyncrasies. Still, of all the books I read this year, these stand out as the ones that most captured and held my attention.

Beeke, Joel R. (ed). *The Beauty and Glory of the Christian Worldview: Puritan Reformed Conference*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2017.

Once upon a time, when evangelicals held large conferences, they used to collect and publish the addresses in book form. The custom has now been largely abandoned, but that is exactly what Joel Beeke and Puritan Reformed Seminary have done in this volume. It contains the addresses delivered at the seminary's conference on Christian worldview in August of 2016. I enjoyed this book as a hybrid of theology, biblical studies and devotional writing. It was good for my soul. Special mention should be made of Michael Barrett's beautiful exposition of Ecclesiastes and of the two essays by Charles Barrett.

Bennett, Jeffrey. *What Is Relativity? An Intuitive Introduction to Einstein's Ideas and Why They Matter*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

My area of expertise—systematic theology—is not exactly one of the STEM disciplines. In the interest of broadening my understanding of the world, however, I try to do a certain amount of reading in the sciences. I picked up Bennett's book on a whim and found it a delightful explanation of Einstein's special and general theories of relativity. Bennett has the gift of making difficult ideas understandable for the non-technical mind. While his writing does not make the results of Einstein's ideas seem any less strange, it does make the ideas themselves more comprehensible, and Bennett helps his readers to understand why those ideas follow from basic assumptions.



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Bock, Darrell L. and Daniel B. Wallace. *Dethroning Jesus: Exposing Popular Culture's Quest to Unseat the Biblical Christ.* Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010.

C. S. Lewis set up the famous trilemma that Jesus must be either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord. Against Lewis, modern criticism insists that Jesus was none of these. Instead, He was (is) essentially a legend, a mythic character who cannot be known historically. Darrell Bock and Daniel Wallace are both professors of New Testament, specializing respectively in Jesus studies and textual criticism. In this book they offer a thoughtful, well-researched, but highly readable response to the “Jesus is just a legend” position that sees the New Testament as hopelessly corrupt and Christianity as the product of later developments. This is a book that an ordinary Christian can read and enjoy.

Callahan, Patti. *Becoming Mrs. Lewis.* Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2018.

Reading this book was a mistake—literally. I misunderstood its genre, assuming that it was biography, when in fact it is historical fiction. Its value is that the fictional aspects are structured around and faithful to what is known about Joy Davidman, the woman who eventually married C. S. Lewis. If I had realized that it was historical fiction, I would not have read it. But I would have missed an enchanting retelling of the Lewis–Davidman story.

Cleaver, Thomas McKelvey. *The Frozen Chosen: The 1st Marine Division and the Battle for the Chosin Reservoir.* Oxford, UK: Osprey, 2016.

When I was growing up, my best friend’s dad was a sergeant at Wurtsmith Air Force Base. Only later did I learn that he had been in the Marines during the Korean Conflict—the man never talked about that part of his life. Later still I discovered that he was one of the Frozen Chosen who were trapped behind the Chinese lines in bitter, subzero temperatures. This book retells that story from a political and military perspective. It explains the division between the Koreans, the involvement of the Chinese, and the failures of American policy that led to the conflict. It also narrates the near-defeat of American Marines (and some Army) during the battle of the Chosin Reservoir. I don’t read much military history, but this work helped me to understand a conflict that has not been resolved yet.

Cook, Becket. *A Change of Affection: A Gay Man’s Incredible Story of Redemption.* Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2019.

I teach a doctoral course on creation, sex, and gender, which means that I have to do a fair bit of reading in and about LGBTQIA+ topics. I always find it refreshing to come across personal written testimonies from people who have been in that world but who have been reached for Christ. Becket Cook offers such a testimony in this book. His story begins with his success

as a set designer in the fashion industry and ends up with him completing a seminary degree and becoming a pastor. Cook’s is a story of genuine conversion by the grace of God.

Doyle, Andrew. *The New Puritans: How the Religion of Social Justice Captured the Western World.* London, UK: Constable, 2022.

Be warned: the very first line of this book contains a double obscenity. The author is not a Christian and not even very conservative. He is liberal and secular—and therein lies the strength of his appeal. He has become convinced that the current social justice ideology is a new religion and that its adherents are zealous to enforce it throughout their civilization, by extirpating all heretics and unbelievers if necessary. Doyle’s claims seem extreme when he first makes them, but he backs them up with persuasive arguments, evidence, and narratives. I think that this is one of those books that will help conservatives and Christians to understand what the Left is really after.

Dreher, Rod. *Live Not By Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents.* New York: Sentinel, 2020.

The author is, of course, a well-known conservative. Like Andrew Doyle, he argues that progressivism in its current forms is (false) religion. Unlike Doyle, he sees the best antidote in countervailing, true religion. In this book, Dreher takes his cues from professing Christians and others who survived the totalitarianism of Soviet communism. While there are points worth quibbling, this book provides part of the helpful preparation in which Christians must engage if they are to face a future of tyranny.

Next week I shall continue with my list of “Most Interesting Reading of 2023.” Remember, I’m not necessarily recommending any book that I list here. I’m not saying it’s a good book, or that everything in it is true. It only appears here because I found it interesting.



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.
