

Alas! By Nature How Depraved

John Newton (1725–1807)

Alas! by nature how depraved,
How prone to ev'ry ill!
Our lives to Satan how enslaved,
How obstinate our will!

And can such sinners be restored,
Such rebels reconciled?
Can grace sufficient means afford
To make the foe a child?

Yes, grace has sound the wond'rous means
Which shall effectual prove;
To cleanse us from our countless sins,
And teach our hearts to love.

Jesus for us a ransom paid,
And died that we might live;
His blood a full atonement made,
And cried aloud, FORGIVE.

Yet one thing more must grace provide,
To bring us home to God;
Or we shall slight the Lord, who died,
And trample on his blood.

The Holy Spirit must reveal
The Savior's work and worth:
Then the hard heart begins to feel
A new and heav'nly birth.

Thus bought with blood, and born again,
Redeemed and saved by grace;
Rebels in God's own house obtain
A son's and daughter's place.

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Favorite Authors, Part Two

Kevin T. Bauder

Last week I wrote about five of my favorite authors. My goal was to discuss ten authors altogether, saving the final five for this essay. But somehow, two extra authors slipped into the list. Here, then, are the remaining seven.

C. S. Lewis wrote works of literary history and criticism, philosophy, apologetics, theology, science fiction, and fantasy. I first encountered his writing when I was in about ninth grade. My father pointed out Lewis's books to me at a store, and I walked out with copies of *The Screwtape Letters* and *Out of the Silent Planet*. I enjoyed both. I resisted reading *The Chronicles of Narnia* because I thought it would be a cheap imitation of Tolkien. I was wrong. It is its own kind of masterpiece. Not everything that Lewis says is right—not by a long shot—but he makes you think even when he is wrong. And some works, such as *An Experiment in Criticism* and *Til We Have Faces*, are irreplaceable.

J. Gresham Machen was the great defender of Christian orthodoxy against the rise of liberal theology. His scholarship was impeccable and his English style was lucid and engaging. Even H. L. Mencken (no friend of fundamentalism) credited Machen's scholarship. His best-known book is *Christianity and Liberalism*, which was more polemical than scholarly. But he also made scholarly contributions, such as *The Virgin Birth of Christ* and *The Origin of Paul's Religion*, that continue to be relevant. His many articles in the *Presbyterian*, the original *Christianity Today*, and the *Presbyterian Guardian* are worth reading when you can find them. Some have been compiled into books.

Richard Mitchell was a professor at Glassboro State College in New Jersey. He published a paper called *The Underground Grammarian*, which he typeset by hand. He also published a series of books bemoaning the sad state of the “educationist” establishment. The first and most important was *Less Than Words Can Say*. Mitchell's writing is sarcastic and even hilarious, but it always has a sober point. His theory of language and consciousness parallels that of Martin Heidegger, though his later thought was modified by an encounter with C. S. Lewis's *The Abolition of Man*. Read him for a laugh, but get ready for a swift kick in the literary pants.



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Thomas Sowell is an excellent example of what happens when a brilliant socialist radical confronts reality and turns into a conservative. I first encountered Sowell's thought in *The Economics and Politics of Race*. Soon I was buying every work of his that crossed my path. Some of Sowell's writings are treatises about economics. Others are more popular arguments about economic issues. Some offer cultural analysis. Some deal with race. Whatever the topic, Sowell discusses it well. Everything he writes is worth reading. He deserves his own complete collection on your Kindle.

J. R. R. Tolkien did not invent the genre of fantasy. What he did was to transform the fantastic epic into a serious literary form. He did this at a time when no responsible critic took fantasy seriously. Later writers from Terry Brooks to George R. R. Martin (who I refuse to read) to J. K. Rowling stand in his shadow. Others have created fantastic worlds that are more detailed and sometimes more colorful. Tolkien is unique for creating a massive legendarium that closely mirrors the moral world of Christianity. If you haven't read *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, why not?

A. W. Tozer captured my imagination early in my Christian preparation. Over the years I have come to agree with less and less of his theology, but to appreciate more and more of his heart for God. Though he had only an eighth-grade education, Tozer read widely in Christian theological and devotional literature. He became an interpreter of those ideas to ordinary Christians living in modernity. The word that I apply to his written style is *vivid*. Perhaps the most useful of Tozer's contributions is his little doctrine of God, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, which he composed on his knees in prayer. Also useful is his compilation of devotional poetry, *The Christian Book of Mystical Verse*. But anything he wrote is a treat for the mind and heart.

Richard M. Weaver was, together with Russell Kirk and Friedrich Hayek, one of the three legs upon which modern conservatism stands. Kirk provides the historical platform for conservatism. Hayek articulates the economic platform. Weaver works out the philosophical justification. The title of his book, *Ideas Have Consequences*, has become a cliché. But the influence of that book has been profound. It attributes the difficulties of modernity to the medieval shift from realism to nominalism. If you're an ordinary reader, you'll probably need to go through the book at least three times before you begin to understand it. Once you do, you'll want to explore some of Weaver's other writings, such as *Visions of Order* and *The Ethics of Rhetoric*.

This list of authors does not include every writer I enjoy reading. Some are fun to read but offer little for the mind to work on (J. K. Rowling is an example). Others articulate important ideas but are difficult to plough through (Jonathan Edwards). The world lacks authors who both think and write well.

I do not mean to limit the list of such authors to the ones I have listed here. I could continue to name other writers who I enjoy reading and who challenge me. But when I started this list, I set a rather arbitrary goal of stopping at ten, and I've already transgressed that boundary by two.

Again, I emphasize that I do not have to agree with an author to enjoy the reading. Some of my best reading is with authors who challenge my thinking by disagreeing with me. I certainly find many points of disagreement with the authors I've listed here. Nevertheless, I find them a delight both to the mind and to the heart.



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.
