

THE CATHOLIC WORLD  
**REPORT**



## "The Best Books I Read in 2017"

Over forty CWR editors and contributors share their favorite reads from the last year.

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Print



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"You can never get a cup of tea large enough, or a book long enough, to suit me." C.S. Lewis supposedly said it or wrote it somewhere (a bit of searching took me in circles on the internet), and while I prefer coffee over tea, I am in full agreement with the basic sentiment. Of course, some great books are rather short; for example, the first book on my list is the Gospel of Luke, which is under 20,000 words.

The key point is that reading is a unique experience and pleasure; it involves body and soul, mind and spirit, emotions and memories. And while reading today, in many ways, is a solitary activity, there is a deeply communal reality to reading: first in the conversation that takes place between author and reader, and then in the conversations that take place between the reader and other readers. There is a special joy to be found in recommending a book, in explaining why a particular volume has meaning and value, in sharing the thoughts and ideas that come forth from the printed page.

There is also a theological dimension. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that "in the condescension of his goodness God speaks to them in human words" and that because of this divine communication, "the Church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord's Body." Yet it also reminds us that "the Christian faith is not a 'religion of the book.'" That is because Christianity "is the religion of the 'Word' of God, a word which is 'not a written and mute word, but the Word is incarnate and living'" (see CCC, 101-108). While Sacred Scripture is unique, reading good books is quite often an experience of grace and goodness, especially as they help us enter more deeply in some way into the Mystery of the Incarnation. Put another way, every good and truthful communication, whether in print

or in speech, finds its source and end in the *Logos*, who is “the Alpha and the Omega” (Rev 1:8; 22:13)—a reference, of course, to the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet.

This little tradition of collecting the “best books read” and sharing them with our readers is now a dozen years old, having proven to be a favorite among all of you who read *Catholic World Report* and the other Ignatius Press sites, as well as the dozens of Ignatius Press books published each year. I think of it as a small gift, not just because it is filled with many good suggestions and insights, but because it draws all of us a bit more into the grand conversation that reveals that we are creatures made in the image of God who yearn to know more, see more, and be more, by God’s grace. So, pour yourself a large (or small) cup of tea or coffee, and enjoy!

Carl E. Olson  
Editor, Catholic World Report and Ignatius Insight

Christopher R. Altieri

Alan L. Anderson

Mary Jo Anderson

Bradley J. Birzer

Daniel Blackman

Joanna Bogle

Mark Brumley

Anthony E. Clark, Ph.D.

James Day

David P. Deavel

Adam A.J. DeVille

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Lauren Enk Mann

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Dr. Kelly Scott Franklin

Aurora C. Griffin

Catherine Harmon

Anne Hendershott

Matthew Cullinan Hoffman

Brian Jones

James Kalb

Joseph Kremers

Derya M. Little

Timothy D. Lusch

Joseph F. Martin

Filip Mazurczak

Dorothy Cummings McLean

Father David Vincent Meconi, SJ

Sandra Miesel

Christopher S. Morrissey

Ines A. Murzaku

Thomas J. Nash

Carl E. Olson

Brian O'Neel

Dr. Jared Ortiz

William L. Patenaude

Tracey Rowland

Gerald J. Russello

Russell Shaw

Edward Short

R.J. Stove

Dr. Patrick Toner

K.V. Turley

*Christopher R. Altieri:*

I did not read many books right through this year. I did read in dozens of them, though, which I had read and often annotated in the marginalia—brief visits with old friends made over the course of 20 or 30 years.

I did reread *That Hideous Strength* at the start of the year, and came to believe that Wither and Frost have been mistaken for models of virtue and good management by too many men too powerful for their mistake.

I read in *From Dawn to Decadence* by Jacques Barzun, from whom I learned the mode of reading called “reading ‘in’” a book. That great and deeply learned man, eminent for his depth and breadth of culture and vision, liberated me from a terrible slavery two decades ago—that of believing one must read cover-to-cover—and I was happy to renew my gratitude to him.

I read in Eric Voegelin’s *New Science of Politics, Science, Politics & Gnosticism*, and here and there in his monumental *Order and History*, from all of which I learn at every reading once again that philosophy is discipleship, and that to be a philosopher is to be a disciple in a way of life, for which study in the discipline is only a necessary and not a sufficient condition.

In reading in Voegelin this time, I understood for the first time what Voegelin means when he says that the essence of philosophy is the mystical problem, and the work of philosophy in the present day its recovery.

I read the book on theosis that Carl E. Olson co-edited, *Called to Be the Children of God: The Catholic Theology of Human Deification*. Almost

as soon as I'd picked it up, I knew it was too late for me: it was with enormous difficulty that I'd worked my way through the issues it addresses, some 15 or 20 years ago, when I had my first and only real intellectual crisis of faith.

Christ is not a human person, but we call Him the New Adam. Personhood is proper to human nature, however; it seems silly now—the way a dream is silly before it bends into a nightmare—but I could not understand how Christ's lack of human personhood could not disqualify either him or us. The answer is in the eschatological key of His whole mission: to draw humanity into the inner life of the Blessed Trinity, and make us to live directly of that life. It is strange to say, but that crisis of a week or 10 days, all those years ago, nearly broke me. When I put down Carl's book, I knew it would have saved me a great deal of trouble if he'd only got to it sooner.

On Christmas Day, my son opened a small package with two copies of **Cicero's Catilinarian orations** (Latin with Italian translation *a fronte*), one for him and one for me, to read together. 2018 is going to be a good year for reading, I can already tell. Let me get to it: I've abused your patience, gentle reader, quite enough.

*Christopher R. Altieri, PhD, is assistant professor of philosophy at the Collegium Augustinianum Research Institute and Graduate School of Philosophy, Theology and Classics.*

*Alan L. Anderson:*

Ah, if only I could be original here. However, I suspect the very best book I read this last year is the same book which tops the list of many faithful Catholics this year—Robert Cardinal Sarah's ***The Power of Silence***. Problem is, I'm still reading it. Having obtained a relatively early copy of the book upon its release, I might have expected to have finished the work by, say, at least mid-June. However, I early on took to reading it right before bed and I find myself continually returning to the words I've read the previous evening simply to relish the effects produced in the soul. It possesses that rarest of qualities in a book—de Sales' ***Treatise on the Love of God*** or a Kempis' ***Imitation of Christ*** come to mind—a simple and cogent access to a deep and beautiful mystery. I simply don't want it to end and, hence, I won't let it.

While working on a piece about Jonah I had occasion to read in depth St. Jerome's short treatise on the Reluctant Prophet. It's available online, [here](#). Given what we know of the good saint's own struggles with, well, a certain tendency toward irascibility, it is readily apparent in the gentle compassion he brings to his analysis of this well-known biblical figure that he sees in Jonah a kindred spirit. It is not at all surprising that a saint who **once made it clear to his two patron bishops** that he was not at all pleased with their insistence he translate the deuterocanonical book of Tobit would find in Jonah a favorite Old Testament archetype. And for those who may similarly find themselves on occasion struggling to carry their individual crosses *joyfully*, I would invite you to give the work a quick read. With all due apologies to the Bard, I would invite you to join us, "we few, we sullen few, we band of brothers."

I reread—as I do every Lent now—the Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen's ***The Cross and the Beatitudes***. Perhaps one of the Venerable Sheen's lesser-read works, this little book presents the startling thesis that in his Seven Last Words from the Cross, Our Lord is modeling for us the first seven of the eight Beatitudes (the Crucifixion itself proving the eighth). I say "startling" because to my knowledge, admittedly limited, it seems almost impossible that after 2,000 years of consideration by the best minds produced by the Church, such as Augustine, Aquinas, et. al, Sheen's simple and persuasive argument of the beautiful congruence between the Beatitudes and the Seven Last Words was still left to be teased from Scripture. Proof of the adage, "ever ancient, ever new."

From the secular world came Flora Fraser's meticulously researched ***The Washingtons: George and Martha, "Join'd by Friendship, Crown'd by Love."*** It provides an in-depth, and I think successful, examination of the marriage of the first First Couple; not an easy task given Martha famously burned all but three of the letters between herself and George. I say "successful" because Fraser, I think, manages to go as far as the evidence can take her in capturing the true complexity of the marriage without sliding into undo speculation, thus violating the intimate mystery inherent in any marriage—a mystery every bit as beautiful and deep as that considered by Cardinal Sarah above.

Finally, and certainly the most touching and enjoyable book I read all year, Tomie de Paola's ***The Legend of the Poinsettia***—though this may have been as much due to the precious granddaughter perched on my lap and at whose insistence I read the book six or seven times over the course of a half-hour as to the obvious beauty of the tale itself.

*Alan L. Anderson is a regional director of religious education for the Catholic Diocese of Peoria and director of religious education for St. Mary's Catholic Church in Metamora, Illinois.*

*Mary Jo Anderson:*

This year opened with Marilynne Robinson's *When I Was a Child I Read Books* (Picador, 2012). The Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist and teacher challenges how we think about what is read-worthy, particularly for Americans. "The language of [American] public life has lost the character of generosity, and the largeness of spirit...has been erased out of historical memory."

A voracious approach to reading is Michael Dirda's *Browsings: A Year of Reading Collecting and Living with Books* (Pegasus 2015, audio). A Pulitzer Prize-winning critic and columnist, Dirda's extensive range doesn't disappoint. But his essays on collecting, sleuthing through old book emporiums, and hobnobbing at detective/mystery/sci-fi/fantasy conferences are the most entertaining.

Because character counts, do not miss *Cloud of Witnesses, Dead People I Knew When They Were Alive* by Father George Rutler (Scepter Publishers, 2010). Pair it with Father James Schall, SJ's *Catholicism and Intelligence* (Emmaus Road Publishing, 2017). For a meditative study, *Mary of Nazareth* by Michael Hesemann (Ignatius Press 2016) is both scholarly and devotional.

*A Gentleman from Moscow*, by Amor Towles (Viking 2016), was my favorite novel this year. In a world of vulgarity—from song lyrics to political ranting—we ought to know that manners, erudition, beauty, and personal discipline inspire a vision of humanity that's nearly lost to modern plundering of the human spirit.

In September the statue of St. Junipero Serra in Santa Barbara was beheaded. That mindless decapitation followed a spate of monument destruction from coast to coast. I had just one volume about Junipero Serra on my shelves, an unread souvenir from Carmel, *Fray Junipero Serra* (Dobronite Publications, 1987) by Mark Brunelle. The sheer grit of Junipero Serra is unmatched. That his determination was in service to "the Church that goes forth," as Pope Francis noted during Serra's canonization, is a zeal we need again.

*Civil War (1862-1865) of Journal of Bishop William Henry Elder, Bishop of Natchez* (download available [here](#)). Why have we not heard of this humane and brave bishop who defied a Union order to add President Lincoln's intentions to the prayers during Mass? His defense of the spiritual over the political won Lincoln's admiration. A former bishop of Chicago, Elder was transferred by Pope Pius IX to Natchez for health reasons, but it was history that had need of him. From those same crucial years, *Frenchman, Chaplain, Rebel: The Civil War Letters of Pere Louis-Hippolyte Gache, 10th Louisiana Infantry*, translated by Cornelius M. Buckley, SJ (University of Alabama Press 2007). This intense account of a Jesuit chaplain, eyewitness to decisive battles, will be a favorite of Catholic history buffs.

When a book is illustrated by Bagram Ibatoulline, just buy it. *The Scarecrow's Dance* by Janet Yolen (Simon and Schuster 2009) asks, what does a scarecrow pray for? Intended audience is for ages 4-9, but the story and illustrations will charm every age. Another illustrator whose pictures tell a story beyond words is Trina Schart Hyman. *St. George and the Dragon* (Little, Brown and Company 1984), retold by Margaret Hodges and illustrated by Hyman, adopts the format of Medieval illuminated texts. The famous story of love, bravery, and sacrifice is shown in fairytale style, though none of the solemnity of suffering is minimized. Story is offered for 7-10 year olds. Purchase two, one for the children on your list and one to keep.

*Meditations for Advent* by Jacques Benigne Bossuet (Sophia Institute Press) is the perfect format for years when Advent cannot be had at a meditative pace. Each reflection is a mere two or three pages. It's chronological—Creation through to the Incarnation and the Adoration of the Magi. Perfect.

*Mary Jo Anderson is a Catholic journalist and speaker.*

*Bradley J. Birzer:*

For once, perhaps only this once, I can discern no real pattern to my yearly reading. I think—shock of shocks—that most of my reading for 2017 came about simply because of interest in one topic or one author or another. At age 50, I feel more satisfied about this than I do guilty.

Hillsdale College's Darryl Hart is one of our country's most prolific writers, publishing a vast slate of books on the past, present, and future trajectory of American evangelicalism. In his latest book, he gets into the soul of the greatest good atheist of the past century, H.L. Mencken. Mencken once stated that if Protestantism is a syllogism, Catholicism is a poem. Truly, Hart captures this curmudgeon's spirit in *Damning Words: The Life and Religious Times of H.L. Mencken* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016).

How does a demigod make money? To answer this, read the extraordinary *Slugfest: Inside the Epic 50 Year Battle Between Marvel and DC* (New York: Da Capo, 2017) by Reed Tucker. I flew through this, absorbing the fascinating attempts by two companies to make the gods and demigods of the ancient world and the saints and martyrs of the medieval world into the heroes and superheroes of the modern and post-modern world. Tucker can write like few others. All around, a great feat.

Along similar lines, Mark Voger's *Groovy: When Flower Power Bloomed in Pop Culture* (Raleigh, NC: Twomorrows)—a book as fascinating a read as it is glorious in its layout—goes well beyond the nostalgia of psychedelic peace, love, and the Banana Splits so many of us a

certain age grew up with in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Voger, as he has so masterfully done in his previous books, explores the details as well as the importance of each subject, from the Beach Boys and the Doors, from *Yellow Submarine* to *Easy Rider*, and from Vietnam to Altamont. The best part of the book is his examination of the co-opting of Jesus as a hippie. *Groovy* is a treasure, a true and deep examination of a decade of American pop culture, recognizing it not as merely ephemeral, but as lingering and permanently imprinted on the American psyche.

The best lecture I attended this year was Lee Edwards' at Hillsdale College, this past fall. Edwards talked about his extraordinary memoir, *Just Right: A Life in Pursuit of Liberty* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2017), detailing his life from a wannabe expat in Paris to spokesman of conservative politics from Goldwater to the present. Edwards, a devout Catholic, recognizes the power of his faith throughout his life, especially as he guided those near or in seats of immense power. Equally important, Edwards practiced a Thomistic humility, recognizing that the only good leader is one who use his (or her) power for the good, the true, and the beautiful, and never for self-aggrandizement.

One of our country's most unsung and least-known national gifts is a young man by the name of Allen Mendenhall, law school president, professor, and writer extraordinaire. In his most recent book of essays, *Of Bees and Boys: Lines from a Southern Lawyer* (Red Dirt Press, 2017), Mendenhall beautifully captures Stoicism, existentialism, corruption, virtue, Freudianism, and, yes, bees.

Bob Merry, intrepid historian, biographer, and editor, tackled the life and times of William McKinley as the architect of the 20th century in his most recent book, but earlier this year, I also had the privilege of reading his excellent *A Country of Vast Designs: James K. Polk, The Mexican War, and the Conquest of the American Continent* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009). When most Americans think "biographer," they think David McCulloch. I do as well, but I also think Robert W. Merry, McCulloch's equal in every respect.

*Bradley J. Birzer is professor of history at Hillsdale College.*

*Daniel Blackman:*

*The Nazi and the Psychiatrist* (Jack El-Hai) is a unique insight into the minds of Nazi leaders put on trial at Nuremberg. Based on the accounts of Nuremberg resident psychiatrist, Dr. Douglas M. Kelley, the book takes readers from the arrest of the Nazi leaders to their time in prison, the trial, and last moments on the gallows. The book offers fascinating insights into the psychological methods used to gauge the often complex minds and personalities of the Nazi inmates. You'll also learn about prison chaplain Father Sixtus O'Connor, OFM, who leads one Nazi leader to repentance and conversion to the Catholic faith—read it to find out who.

*SAS Rogue Heroes* (Ben MacIntyre) is a fantastically well-researched and masterly written history of the first SAS soldiers. One of the book's strengths is the author's ability to vividly convey the virtues, vices, and temperaments of each of the soldiers drawn from every background, along with descriptive portrayals of their heroic, foolish, and sometimes bloodthirsty actions during World War II, all which make the SAS the enduring mystery it is today.

*The Outsider* (Fredrick Forsyth) is the autobiography of Fredrick Forsyth: Cold War journalist, sometime agent of Britain's MI6 secret service, explorer, man of adventure, and famous novelist. It's the fast-paced, page-turning life of the man who wrote such hits as *The Odessa File* and *The Day of the Jackal*.

*Solider Spy* (Tom Marcus) is a first-person account of what it's really like to be an intelligence officer in Britain's MI5 domestic secret service, told by a former agent under the pen-name Tom Marcus. At a time when the UK has been struck by repeated terrorist attacks, it's good to get an authentic insight into the training and operations of those whose job it is to prevent terrorist attacks before they happen, and the sometimes sad impact the job can have on those working for MI5.

*Do Not Harm: Stories of Life, Death, and Brain Surgery* (Henry Marsh) is written by retired senior consultant neurosurgeon Henry Marsh. The book is a collection of reflections on his role as a surgeon and the patients who looked to him for a lifeline, those he saves, and those who die in his hands. There's a striking chapter describing his visit to a nursing home run by Catholic sisters, only to recognize the names of the residents as his former patients, now confined to bed, mute and disabled, but cared for by the good sisters.

*Epistle of St. James* (St James the Less) is one of the shortest books of the New Testament, but without doubt, St. James is among the best writers of the Bible. His ability to write poetically and his use of similes make the epistle a pleasure to read for those inclined to good writing. And, with 2017 being the anniversary of Martin Luther's foolishness, there is without doubt no better way to "honor" it than by reading and re-reading the epistle Luther disparagingly called "straw"!

*Hamlet, King Lear, Othello, Macbeth* (William Shakespeare) are collectively known as "the tragedies." Once you familiarize yourself with the archaic prose, therein lies a treasure trove of wit and wisdom for you the reader—the sort of stuff you'd want to remember and be able to cite at great length (if only!).

Daniel Blackman is a journalist who has written for *New Blackfriars*, *the Catholic Herald*, *Humanum*, *Homiletic & Pastoral Review*, and *Aleteia*.

Joanna Bogle:

One of the best books I read in 2017 was an old and crumbly paperback, lent by a friend, the pages brown and the edges coming away in my hand. I am delighted to report that in fact the book is also available brand-new, as it's a classic and still in print: C.S. Lewis' *Reflections on the Psalms*. Hugely recommended. Lewis tackles the questions many of us did not dare to ask about the Psalms, notably the one that niggled me when I was younger and I had always tried to brush aside: why does God seem to need and even demand our praise? Lewis explores the nature of praise: the gratitude that makes us exclaim with awe at a glorious view and want to share it with friends...for this and for much, much more, renewed thanks to the man who gave us Narnia.

Brand-new, and published in 2017, George Weigel's *Lessons in Hope*—detailing his experiences with St. John Paul, working on the latter's biography—is an utterly enjoyable read. It's no tiresome list of sentimentally recalled conversations, but a wonderful insight into the life and message of this magnificent successor of St. Peter, spiced with descriptions of some frustrations with Vatican bureaucrats and warmed with a sense of the glory of the Faith that is ours to love and to transmit. I devoured it with relish and am now re-reading it.

Involvement with the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham in recent years has prompted a renewed interest in the Oxford Movement. The best book on the subject that I have found is *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship 1760-1857* by Peter Nockles. I took a look at it some years ago when I needed a reference for something, and then reconnected with it this year when it virtually leapt out at me from the shelf of the university library where I was looking for good material on the subject. I had not really grasped the vast importance of the Tractarians and the Oxford Movement in sealing into British life that glorious gothic-revival architecture which gave us—among much else—our Houses of Parliament. There is something sad about reading about the Church of England of the 1830s and 40s from the perspective of the very different Britain of the 21st century; but the answer lies with the Ordinariate, which is “gathering up all that is left” and giving it new life in full communion with the Catholic Church. As one who now relishes Evensong and Mass in the Ordinariate Form, I badly want my Anglican friends to know of the hope and the reassurance that could be theirs: come on in, it's wonderful!

Finally: still to enjoy is a book that carries the warm endorsement of a friend, Professor Tracey Rowland. It is *Wind from Heaven: The Poet Who Became Pope*, by Monica Jablonska and although already published and available, it's under wraps for me, because at my request my husband is giving it to me for Christmas and I am writing this in early December. I'm being very restrained as I have been told the book—about St. John Paul, his plays and poetry—is fascinating. It arrived by post and is waiting, carefully labelled, for Christmas morning. I'm looking forward to that moment when I pull it from the wrapping—here's a loving “THANK YOU!” from my heart, in advance.

Joanna Bogle is a journalist in the United Kingdom.

Mark Brumley:

As usual, I leave out the Ignatius titles I read.

*The End of the Affair* by Graham Greene. A well-written book that depressed me. What a mess the narrator is. And what a mess Greene was when he wrote it. A book club pick. We had a good discussion of it, I think.

*Truth* by John Caputo. Postmodernism meets Caputo's reading of Augustine. Worthwhile, but I think methodical realism and classical theism, carefully nuanced and adjusted in light of postmodernism, does the trick better when it comes to a well-rounded, robust approach to truth.

*Rebel in the Ranks* by Brad Gregory. Gregory's popular Reformation book published in the year of the 500th anniversary of the start of the Reformation. A great read, more accessible than his *The Unintended Reformation*, which is also a good book and more a work on “how we got here” than *Rebel* is.

*The Oresteia* by Aeschylus. I read the *Agamemnon* many years ago. This time I read it and I also read *Libation Bearers* and *The Eumenides*, the other two plays of Aeschylus' trilogy. Learned a lot. There's reason these tragedies were performed as a trilogy and reading all three together helps the reader capture the story and its complexities.

***A World in Disarray: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Old Order*** by Richard Haas. Yes, there is a crisis. And Mr. Trump isn't going to fix it.

***The Aeneid*** by Virgil. A reread. Like the reread of the *Iliad* a while back, rereading the *Aeneid* was like reading a different book. Oh well. I'm glad I have learned some things over the years that help the rereading of this great book. The retelling of Rome's founding in light of Augustus fits so well with the theme of "retelling" I've encountered with so much ancient literature, especially the New Testament's use of so many Old Testament stories and themes, and contemporary deconstructionism's and postmodernism's attitudes toward grand narratives.

***Protestants: The Faith That Made the Modern World*** by Alec Ryrie. Interesting but overstated. Protestants aren't a "faith"; they a group of people with a variety of interpretations of the Christian faith sufficiently alike or at least historically linked or both to be called by the same name, "Protestants." But that's a bit of a quibble trying to work itself up into a review. We'll see if I find the time.

***Reformation Thought: An Introduction***, 3rd edition by Alister McGrath. A re-read in the year marking the 500 anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. The book holds up pretty well. I advise Catholics to read it, along with their usual diet of Catholic stuff. In that respect it can be a helpful corrective to the danger of one-sided Catholic accounts.

***The Scarlet Pimpernel*** by Baroness Orczy. A book club pick. Superb, that damned elusive pimpernel. A great book on the importance of communications in marriage.

***The Unknown Universe: A New Exploration of Time, Space, and Modern Cosmology*** by Stuart Clark. No big revelations but a serviceable presentation of the subject matter.

***We Hold These Truths*** by Mortimer J. Adler. A re-read. The book originally appeared with the 200th anniversary of the US Constitution. Always good to read a couple of Adler books a year. This is a good touchstone work in its philosophical treatment of the great ideas of the Declaration of Independence and the Preamble to the Constitution.

***Memoir*** by Frederick Copleston, SJ. I had never read this wonderful autobiography of one of the 20th century's greatest philosophers and historians of philosophy. This year, I did.

*Mark Brumley is president and CEO of Ignatius Press.*

*Anthony E. Clark, Ph.D.:*

When the world around them is in apparent chaos, the Chinese often quip: "At least we live in interesting times." Christianity has never confronted such extreme antipathy from the secular world, and even the most secular of world intellectuals have remarked on the crisis this has engendered. The self-identified secular atheist, Jürgen Habermas, wrote that: "Christianity, and nothing else, is the ultimate foundation of liberty, conscience, human rights, and democracy, the benchmarks of Western civilization. To this day, we have no other options. We continue to nourish ourselves from this source. Everything else is postmodern chatter." And when the once-fashionable British aristocrat, Evelyn Waugh, converted to Catholicism, he remarked that: "It seems to me that in the present phase of European history the essential issue is no longer between Catholicism, on one side, and Protestantism, on the other, but between Christianity and Chaos." Well, I do not wish to start 2018 with gloomy pessimism, but we are now confronted with an era of confusion that only Christianity can resolve. "Interesting times" call for "interesting reading," and here are a few books that have occupied the small circle of light in my small Spokane office.

Certainly, one of the most trenchant commentators on spiritual survival in today's context is Cardinal Robert Sarah, and so I read his insightful book ***God or Nothing***. One concise quote represents well the proposal of this timely work: "A Godless society, which considers any spiritual questions a dead letter, masks the emptiness of its materialism by killing time so as better to forget eternity."

Jennifer Lin's masterfully-written account of her family's Christian endurance through China's early Communist years, ***Shanghai Faithful***, is an eerily apropos book. Throughout her heart-wrenching narrative of human suffering under Maoism, Lin punctuates her story with human goodness that colors her family biography with Christian optimism.

Another excellent book on the topic of Christian perseverance during China's turbulent Maoist era—perhaps I am biased—is my wife Amanda C.R. Clark's new book, ***China's Last Jesuit***. This is an exhilarating scholarly account of the missionary work and suffering of Father Charles McCarthy, SJ, who was imprisoned by China's Communists for the crime of being an "intellectual saboteur."

As a professor of Asian history, I thought I should at last read the Japanese classic novel by Murasaki, ***The Tale of Genji***. Well, I admit to picking the abridged version, but I am delighted to have finally plunged into this richly descriptive story of the "shining" prince, whose

exploits are as entertaining as they are illustrative of medieval Japan's fascinating culture.

Last on my list of good reads for 2017 is Barbara Pym's splendid tale of academic life at a provincial English university in the early 1970s, *An Academic Question*. My wife and I continue to lighten this shadowy era by reading Pym novels to each other after long days of lecturing, grading, attending meetings, and struggling to squeeze in a few minutes of research. *An Academic Question* astutely—and humorously—portrays the pressures of being a professor...as well as the silliness one sees in it when reading about it from an outside observer.

I write this year's list while snow falls through darkened skies outside the windows beside my desk; the snowflakes somehow remind me of the expected brightness at the end of Advent. Christ remains the hope and light of our weary world, and may His divine mercy bring us all a better 2018, and one with more good books to nourish our tired souls.

*Anthony E. Clark, Ph.D. is an associate professor of Chinese history at Whitworth University.*

*James Day:*

In alphabetical order:

*AA-1025: The Memoirs of a Communist's Infiltration into the Church* (Marie Carre, TAN Books, 1972);

"**Michelangelo**" from *The Lives of the Artists* (Giorgio Vasari, 1550; Bondanella, trans. Oxford World's Classics, 2008);

*My Battle Against Hitler: Faith, Truth, and Defiance in the Shadow of the Third Reich* (Dietrich von Hildebrand; Crosby, ed., Image, 2014), particularly "Part Two: Writings Against the Nazi Ideology";

*Pensées and Other Writings* (Blaise Pascal, 1670; Levi, ed., Oxford World's Classics, 2008);

*Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant* (Ulysses S. Grant, Charles L. Webster & Co., 1885-1886, published by Mark Twain);

*The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare* (G.K. Chesterton, J.W. Arrowsmith, 1908);

*The Power and the Glory* (Graham Greene, Heinemann, 1940);

*The Shroud: The 2000-Year-Old Mystery Solved* (Ian Wilson, Bantam, 2011);

Honorable mention: *Promises of Power: A Political Autobiography* (Carl B. Stokes, Simon & Schuster, 1973)

*James Day is a producer and operations manager for EWTN's West Coast Studio in Orange County, California.*

*David P. Deavel:*

Though a professor and academic journal editor I find most academic books painful to read, but three new volumes in 2017 stood out. James L. Nolan, Jr.'s *What They Saw in America* compares and contrasts the views on American culture and politics of four US sojourners, Tocqueville, Max Weber, Chesterton, and Sayyid Qutb. Father John Mc Nerney's *The Wealth of Persons* examines the genius of the human person through philosophical and theological lenses, explaining why these are enhanced in a free market under a rule of law. David Delio's "*An Aristocracy of Exalted Spirits: The Idea of the Church in Newman's Tamworth Reading Room*" is the best and fullest treatment of Newman's brilliant essay in faith and reason, education, and—as Delio argues—ecclesiology.

An intellectual (though non-academic) treat was Christopher Wiley's *The Man of the House*. He urges men to see themselves, whether married and fathers or not, as providers of shelter for others. Wiley gives both a rationale for this vision and plenty of advice on accomplishing it. Former model Leah Darrow offers something similarly helpful for women young and old in her new *Other Side of Beauty*. Darrow explains why looking beautiful, though good, is not as important as being beautiful. Finally, in my G.K. Chesterton course, I was amazed again by the jolly journalist's relevance when we read *The Superstition of Divorce*. Though written in 1920, it has a ripped-from-the-headlines feel. For men and women, married and monastic, I recommend my spiritual reading: volume I of *The Philokalia*, the 16th-century compendium of spiritual writings by Orthodox Saints Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and Makarios of Corinth. Evagrius, John Cassian, et al will shame, inspire, and give you a spiritual plan of action.

It's been said, "Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people." While pithy, it doesn't fit an incarnational faith. People are fascinating. Midge Decter's 2000 memoir *An Old Wife's Tale*, focusing on the changes in relations between men and women in the 20th century, is a good perspective amid today's tumult. Justice Clarence Thomas's *My Grandfather's Son* (2007), besides being a cracking tale of being raised by his hard-as-nails Catholic convert sharecropper grandfather, provides a unique perspective on race, sex, and faith. My friend John Groppe's collection of poems, *The Raid of the Grackles*, has lots of avian ruminations but more beautiful reflections on his and others' lives. Finally, Philip Eade's *Evelyn Waugh: A Life Revisited* is a sympathetic examination of an often personally unsympathetic man, taking seriously both his faith and his hidden humility.

Speaking of Waugh, *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold*, a fictionalized account of a bout of insanity, and the first two volumes of the *Sword of Honor* trilogy, about the tedium and craziness of World War II, though more about the war for sanity in the formerly Christian west, were extremely timely. With my older boys I finished *That Hideous Strength*, Lewis's final space-trilogy volume, and *The Lord of the Rings*. The latter had its *longeurs*, certainly, but I'd forgotten how the third volume is a freight train of action. Though an entirely different sort of fiction, Marilynne Robinson's trilogy, *Gilead*, *Home*, and *Lila*, about small-town Iowa in the 1950s, is utterly gripping in the way it reveals its characters and story through different perspectives in each volume. Finally, a small comic delight is my late friend Larry Pavlicek's novel of a small-time Mob wannabe sentenced by a judge to life in a monastery. *Get Louie Stigs* is about whether God or the Mob will get the titular figure. Readers will laugh; God laughs last.

David P. Deavel is editor of *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* and visiting assistant professor of Catholic Studies at the University of St. Thomas (Minnesota).

Dr. Adam A.J. DeVille:

#### Moral philosophy:

Twenty years ago I wrote a master's thesis on Alasdair MacIntyre, and I have never stopped learning from him. His latest book, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, published as he nears 90, shows no abatement of powers, no slackening of pace. If anything, it shows him continuing to expand his focus in astonishing ways while also revisiting his very earliest books on Marx and Freud, who remain important today as we struggle against the misdirection and manipulation of our desires by neoliberal capitalism.

#### Biographies:

MacIntyre also cites the important work of D.W. Winnicott, the wartime pediatrician and psychoanalyst in London who did so much to advance our understanding of the "good-enough mother" and how early family life shapes our desires for good or ill. So I read two biographies this year: *Winnicott* by Adam Phillips, and *In Search of the Real: The Origins and Originality of D.W. Winnicott* by Dodi Goldman, which is much the richer of the two.

Phillips has also written *Becoming Freud: The Making of a Psychoanalyst*, a short but invaluable study showing how the early Freud (up to 1906) is a much more subversive, creative, and liberating figure than the late Freud, especially from 1927 onwards, when he wrote what he himself rightly called his worst book, *Future of an Illusion*.

The clash between the old world of Freud and the new world of American academic psychiatry emerges in Lawrence J. Friedman's *Identity's Architect: A Biography of Erik H. Erikson* and in Charles Strozier's *Heinz Kohut: The Making of a Psychoanalyst*. Both of these superlative studies tell us about Erikson and Kohut, who were trained in Vienna but made their mark in America.

#### The papacy & ecclesiology:

The two best books in ecclesiology I've read this year are Cyril Hovorun's *Scaffolds of the Church* and A.E. Sicienski's *The Papacy and the Orthodox: Sources and History of a Debate*. I interviewed both authors on my blog.

T.A. Howard's *The Pope and the Professor: Pius IX, Ignaz von Döllinger, and the Quandary of the Modern Age* is simply superb for reasons I blogged about in detail.

#### Diaries/memoirs:

This year I re-read *The Fringes of Power: 10 Downing Street Diaries, 1939-1955* by Jock Colville. It was interesting to match some of its entries alongside *The Maisky Diaries: Red Ambassador to the Court of St. James's, 1932-1943*.

Terry Eagleton's *The Gatekeeper: A Memoir* is a short but punchy read, as is his partially convincing *Why Marx Was Right*. (Eagleton—and

MacIntyre—have both convinced me I must begin in 2018 seriously to read the Dominican theologian Herbert McCabe, whose 1980 essay “The Class Struggle and Christian Love” I used in class this semester.)

### Psychoanalysis:

This year I discovered the works of Ana-María Rizzuto, who was a catechist in Argentina before moving to Boston to finish medical and psychoanalytic training. Her book *Why Did Freud Reject God?: A Psychodynamic Interpretation* is fascinating, and builds on her invaluable 1979 book, *The Birth of the Living God*, the first major study to show that, *pace* Freud, “God” is not the projection of infantile neurotics.

The other major figure I re-discovered this year (after briefly reading him in the 1990s) is the absolutely fascinating Anglo-American psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas. His best-known book, *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known*, has just been reissued in a 30th-anniversary edition. Its chapter on “normotic illness” is extremely insightful in the age of Trump and social media—insights I expect him to amplify when his new book *Mourning and Melancholia: Life in the Age of Bewilderment* appears in 2018.

*Dr. Adam A.J. DeVille is associate professor and chairman of the Department of Theology-Philosophy at the University of St. Francis.*

### *William Doino, Jr.:*

The best book I read this past year was *Fun is Not Enough* by Father Francis Canavan, SJ. It is a new collection of the late Jesuit’s commentaries in the *Catholic Eye*, over the 25 years he wrote for that memorable newsletter. Richly informed, lucid, and razor-sharp, Canavan’s essays cover every major controversy involving the Church and modernity—from the sexual revolution, abortion and religious liberty, to divorce, social justice and atheism—all from an unabashedly orthodox Catholic perspective. If you are troubled by the strange things being said these days by many high-ranking Jesuits and prelates, Father Canavan’s book is the perfect antidote to refresh one’s mind and spirit.

As 2017 marked the 100th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, there was a stream of books marking that infamous occasion, and the two most powerful I encountered were *Red Famine* by Anne Applebaum and *The House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution* by Yuri Slezkine. Applebaum’s latest is the third in a masterful trilogy of works—beginning with her Pulitzer-Prize-winning *Gulag*, followed by *Iron Curtain*—chronicling the history and horrors of Soviet Communism. Her new book describes the harrowing terror-famine Joseph Stalin inflicted upon the Ukraine, taking nearly 4 million lives. Like its predecessors, *Red Famine* is superbly researched, and sure to become a classic in its field.

Yuri Slezkine is not as well-known, but he should be, since his *House of Government* is a 1,000-page epic, drawing comparisons to Tolstoy and Solzhenitsyn. It tells the history of an enormous apartment building, across the Moscow River from the Kremlin, built in 1931 to house the devoted Communist leaders and families of Stalin’s regime—until their utopian dreams were shattered, their loyalties betrayed, and their lives extinguished in Stalin’s ruthless purges. Utilizing letters, diaries, and interviews, alongside rare photographs, and unforgettable biographical and psychological portraits, Slezkine’s book is a mesmerizing account of the madness of Soviet Communism and the people who tragically fell under its spell.

Ian Kershaw’s *To Hell and Back: Europe 1914-1949* is another work I was fortunate enough to read. It is a panoramic and gripping narrative of the upheavals that shook the entire continent between the First and Second World Wars. I also learned a great deal from Michael Burleigh’s *The Best of Times, The Worst of Times: A History of Now*, which covers the major events of the 21st century, with a peer into our likely future, without playing favorites. Burleigh is a sober and candid analyst who rebukes foolishness and corruption on the Left as much as the Right. He doesn’t always tell liberals or conservatives what they want to hear, but what they need to hear.

I have long admired the Danish Lutheran philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, not least because of his sympathy for the Catholic Church. Jack Mulder’s excellent *Kierkegaard and the Catholic Tradition* was therefore a wonderful discovery, and complemented my reading of Stephen Backhouse’s equally fine *Kierkegaard: A Single Life*. The latter makes Kierkegaard’s life and thought clear and engaging—not an easy thing to do for a great Christian thinker, so complicated and often misunderstood.

Finally, few ideas have been discussed more often in the Church today than “reform.” But many who invoke it often confuse “reform” with doctrinal and moral laxity. One book which doesn’t is C. Colt Anderson’s *The Great Catholic Reformers: From Gregory the Great to Dorothy Day*, which shows how genuine Catholic reform has always been rooted in classic Catholic teaching—not innovation, much less dissent—and thus proves a very helpful corrective to erroneous ideas circulating today.

*William Doino, Jr. has written about religion, history, and culture for many publications, including First Things, the Catholic Herald, National Review, and America.*

Eduardo Echeverria:

Re-read Karol Wojtyla's *Love and Responsibility*, but this time the new English translation.

*A Reader in Catholic Social Teaching: From Syllabus Errorum to Deus Caritas Est*, Editor, Kwasniewski, Peter A.

*Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique*, Editor, Moreland, J. P.

*Romans (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture)*, Hahn, Scott W.

*Cathedra Veritatis: On the Extension of Papal Infallibility*, Joy, John.

*How to Think: A Survival Guide for a World at Odds*, Jacobs, Alan.

*The God I Don't Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith*, Wright, Christopher J. H.

*The Catholic Luther: His Early Writings*, edited Philip D. W. Krey.

*Cheap Sex: The Transformation of Men, Marriage, and Monogamy*, Regnerus, Mark.

*Was the Reformation a Mistake?: Why Catholic Doctrine Is Not Unbiblical*, Levering, Matthew.

*Benedict and Francis*, Gerhard Ludwig Müller.

*An Introduction to Vatican II as an Ongoing Theological Event* (Sacra Doctrina), Levering, Matthew.

*Biblical Authority After Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity*, Kevin Vanhoozer.

*Eduardo Echeverria is professor of philosophy and systematic theology at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit.*

Lauren Enk Mann:

*The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom. This inside view of the Holocaust from the perspective of a Dutch Christian is gut-wrenching yet ultimately uplifting. In telling the story of her family's arrest and persecution at the hands of the Nazis for protecting Jews, ten Boom addresses the one of the fundamental crises of a Christian in the world: is love stronger than hate? Uppermost is ten Boom's insistence on the power of grace and forgiveness, and her determination to see those who subjected her and her sister to inhuman suffering as human beings themselves in need of healing and mercy. Among the many memorable lines is this gem: "The experiences of our lives, when we allow God to use them, become the mysterious and perfect preparation for the work He will give us to do."

*Scoop* by Evelyn Waugh. In no way as refined and masterful as *Brideshead Revisited*, *Scoop* is still worth a read for its unscrupulous and at times uproarious satire of journalism. Much of what he says about the denizens of Fleet Street still holds true of the news media today. The plot is flimsy and occasionally the pace drags; however, Waugh's unparalleled use of language and appreciation for the tragicomic make it an enjoyable read.

*Heretics* by G.K. Chesterton. If Chesterton is ever canonized, it will be for this book—not, as one might suspect from the title, because he offers in it a rousing defense of the Faith, but because his approach to those with whom he disagrees on a variety of issues is one of tremendous charity. He never treats his philosophical opponents with condescension, but always first and foremost points out what they have to offer and where they are correct.

*Something Other Than God* by Jennifer Fulwiler. Not only is Fulwiler's style eminently readable, her writing is total substance and devoid of fluff and vapidity. In this personal conversion story, she confronts difficult topics like abortion and contraception head-on, without glossing over the struggles entailed in fidelity to the Church's teaching.

*Race with the Devil: My Journey from Racial Hatred to Rational Love* by Joseph Pearce. Racism and neo-Nazism were much in the news in 2017, and Pearce offers an insider's look at the psychological motivation behind such radicalism—and a glimpse at the spiritual key necessary for conversion and healing.

*A Distant Prospect* by Annette Young. A well-crafted novel charmingly set in 1920s Sydney, *A Distant Prospect* relates the healing power of

music in the lives of four young women at a Catholic girl's school who overcome their prejudices, disabilities, and troubled pasts to form a string quartet. Australian author Annette Young's story combines a Catholic worldview with a profoundly human story that directly yet humbly engages the difficult questions of suffering, trauma, and the loss of loved ones. Especially notable is the way Young's evocative descriptions draw the reader into the transcendental power of music.

*Lauren Enk Mann is a freelance editor residing in Northern Virginia.*

*Jeanette Flood:*

Of the books I read in my line of work in 2017, two are particularly remarkable. First is Steve Wood's ***Grace and Justification: An Evangelical's Guide to Catholic Beliefs***, published this year, the 500th after Luther's break from the Church. I thought I understood the basics of the catalyst of the Protestant Reformation, but I quickly found out how much more there is to know. Wood gives a most thorough and enlightening explanation, firmly founded in history and theology. A must-read for anyone who wants to understand a key dispute in the Protestant-Catholic divide.

Second is ***Pathway Under the Gaze of Mary***, the biography of Lucia dos Santos, one of the Fatima visionaries. It was interesting to learn how she lived her life, how faithful, cheerful, indefatigable, and holy she was. And by including statements that the consecration of Russia was accepted by Our Lady, which she made more than once to her religious community, the Carmelite sisters with whom she lived for decades, clearly put to rest any doubt on that issue.

Among the other books I read in 2017, ***Church of Spies: The Pope's Secret War against Hitler***, by Mark Riebling, stands out as a late-night-inducing page-turner. While I always enjoy well-written historical narratives and have a fascination with all forms of anti-Nazi resistance, this work was particularly riveting. Riebling's work is full of surprises, revealing the secret efforts of famous figures such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the wrongly maligned Pope Pius XII as well as previously unknown heroes. One thing that struck me, for instance, was the uncanny way Hitler narrowly and inadvertently evaded multiple attempts on his life, leading me to think there must be guardian demons as well as guardian angels (at least for influential evildoers). Abounding in detail and substance for reflection, it is definitely a book I will re-read.

I recently picked up ***The Man Born to Be King***, a series of radio-plays on the life of Christ by Dorothy Sayers. I loved it the first time I read it, when Ignatius Press first published it over 25 years ago, and I am enjoying it again now. In supplying three-dimensional characters and marvelous dialogue, Sayers makes the Gospel stories as vivid as if the reader were taken physically to first-century Palestine. Anyone who wants to know and love Jesus better is encouraged to read this gem.

Finally, my favorite among the books I encountered in 2017 is ***Divine Intimacy***, by Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen. I won't pretend I've yet read the whole of this rich volume of meditations for every day of the liturgical year, but what I did read was like manna from heaven and gave me a hearty appetite for more. This is the perfect prescription for those who have spent years striving to grow in prayer and virtue and are wondering if they will ever reach the "Unitive Way"; it provides inspiring previews, hope, and clear directions on how to get there.

*Jeanette Flood has written for Our Sunday Visitor, St. Austin Review, Faith and Family, and several other publications.*

*Dr. Kelly Scott Franklin:*

Herman Melville's ***Moby-Dick***. Madness. Whales. Pairs nicely with *Paradise Lost*.

John Milton's ***Paradise Lost***. Christian epic poem throws other epics under the bus. Fascinating depiction of Satan.

Ron Chernow's ***Washington: A Life***. Good news: George Washington really was that awesome. Bad news: he actually cut down a couple cherry trees.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's ***House of the Seven Gables***. Underrated American classic. How do we relate to the sins of the past? A rare happy ending, for once in Hawthorne's life.

Mark Twain's ***The Adventures of Tom Sawyer***. Not just a boy's book. Charming story of a child hero. I even co-taught a free online course on Mark Twain! [Sign up here.](#)

Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*. First female Pulitzer-winner. Amazing realist. [Read my WSJ piece on it here.](#)

Suzanne M. Wolfe's *The Confessions of X*. Fictional life of Augustine's unnamed concubine. Great prose. Brilliantly researched. [I reviewed it for Catholic World Report here.](#)

Provan, Long, and Longman's *A Biblical History of Israel (Second Edition)*. OK, I cheated and didn't read the whole thing. Don't tell my professors at the Augustine Institute. But the first half of the book is an amazing scholarly defense of the historicity of the Bible. Essential for cutting through the fashionable nonsense and smug skepticism of so much biblical scholarship.

*Dr. Kelly Scott Franklin is a writer and assistant professor of English at Hillsdale College.*

*Aurora C. Griffin:*

I tend to read down rabbit holes, conducting deep dives of eight-to-ten books on a single subject at a time. This year, one of my themes of exploration has been happiness. The most comprehensive recommendation I have is Father Spitzer's four-part series, beginning with *Finding True Happiness*. Father Spitzer suggests that we evolve in happiness from pursuing pleasure to achieving honor to serving others to loving God. If you want to trace this theme in a more academic way and allow history's exemplars to instruct you, this is the series for you.

I also recommend *A Catholic Guide to Depression* by Aaron Kheriaty, a Catholic psychiatrist and friend. His book, which I've recommended to friends, family members, and strangers, touches on a subject that most of us have first-hand experience with. Whether we ourselves suffer from depression or someone we love does, his book is a compassionate and clinically insightful resource. He tackles subjects that are difficult to talk about, like the distinction (and overlap) between the dark night of the soul and psychological disorder. Whatever the ailment, Dr. Kheriaty rightly says that our suffering can draw us closer to God:

Wherever the cross is, there Jesus can be found. If we unite our heart to the heart of Christ, in whatever environment we find ourselves, we will be a person who spreads this love to others... Even in the thick of depression, which tends to turn us in ourselves, with God's grace we can still become an instrument to bring his joy and peace to others around us. (202)

A third and final recommendation is G.K. Chesterton's *Saint Francis of Assisi*. After failing to build a church he thought God wanted Him to build, getting in a huge, public blowout with his father, and then taking off half-naked into the woods during winter, Francis experienced a deep desolation, or even depression. But he came out of it a new man. Chesterton describes it thus:

Francis at the time or somewhere at the time when he disappeared into the prison or the dark cavern, underwent a reversal of a certain psychological kind; which was really like the reversal of a complete somersault... He looked at the world as differently from other men as if he had come out of that dark hole walking on his hands. (63)

When God asked Francis to try (and fail) to build that church, He was making something of His own that was far more precious. Nothing is a more powerful or enduring witness, and no one possesses more joy than a saint.

*Aurora C. Griffin is the author of How I Stayed Catholic at Harvard.*

*Catherine Harmon:*

Some of my favorite books from this last year, in no particular order, were:

*Pitch by Pitch: My View of One Unforgettable Game* by Bob Gibson. I read this last January, in the cold, dark days before baseball season began (OK, only cold and dark figuratively speaking, as I live in Southern California). The title tells the story here—former Major League pitcher Gibson takes the reader pitch by pitch through Game 1 of the 1968 World Series between the St. Louis Cardinals and the Detroit Tigers, interspersing the play-by-play with stories about the colorful characters populating both teams. I grew up with my mom's 1968 Cardinals' pennant on my wall, so it was a kick to read about the men behind the names I knew well, and to see what has changed and what has remained the same about baseball since the late 60s—all while enjoying Gibson's wry and often acerbic style.

*A Glass of Blessings* by Barbara Pym. This book is an illustration of why I love CWR's annual "Best Books" feature—after reading [Dr.](#)

**Anthony Clark's recommendation** of Barbara Pym's novels in last year's edition, I read several of them as I recovered from giving birth last spring. *A Glass of Blessings* was my favorite—about a bored and worldly English housewife who finds herself irresistibly drawn into the decidedly unfashionable society of pious, and somewhat ridiculous, church-goers.

*A Rocking-Horse Catholic* by Caryll Houselander. Caryll Houselander could have been a character in one of Barbara Pym's novels—awkward, unglamorous, a plain and self-effacing spinster to all outward appearances. But beneath this unassuming exterior was a woman of strong spiritual insight on fire with love for Christ.

*Strangers in a Strange Land: Living the Catholic Faith in a Post-Christian World* by Archbishop Charles Chaput. This is Archbishop Chaput's frank, no-nonsense assessment of where we are today as people of faith in an increasingly secular—and hostile—society. But while Chaput is clear-eyed about the challenges the Church faces, his message remains rooted in Christian hope.

Our favorite family read-aloud books this year were *Ronia the Robber's Daughter*, by Astrid Lindgren (thoroughly enjoyed even by my squirrely three-year-old boy) and the Betsy-Tacy books (especially *Betsy, Tacy, and Tib* and *Betsy and Tacy Go Over the Big Hill*) by Maude Hart Lovelace. Our favorite new picture-book was *The Legend of St. Christopher*, by Margaret Hodges with illustrations by Richard Jesse Watson.

*Catherine Harmon is managing editor of Catholic World Report.*

*Anne Hendershott:*

It was a year of historical fiction for me this year. Not sure why, but I seemed to be drawn all year to reading about how men and women coped with the global conflicts that took place from 1914, with the start of the “War to End All Wars,” to the triumph of the Allies in World War II in 1945. This journey through the two world wars all began for me last winter when I read Kristen Hannah's *The Nightingale*—a hauntingly beautiful story of two sisters committed to doing something to resist the oppressive situation they found themselves in German-occupied, war-torn France. Action-packed and engaging, I was drawn to learn more about the roles courageous women played during the war. *The Lilac Girls* by Martha Hall Kelly was my next choice. This novel is “based on the life” of the very real Caroline Ferriday, a New York socialite, who had a second home in Connecticut—not far from my own Connecticut home. Fluent in French, Ferriday was working as a volunteer at the French consulate in Manhattan when Hitler's army invaded Poland in September 1939, and then set its sights on France. Ferriday mobilized her resources to help those in the underground resistance movement. It is an engaging novel; the author weaves in stories of other women through the narrative, including a Polish teenager who became a courier for the underground and an ambitious young German doctor who engages in some of the most heinous experiments on prisoners during her time working in one of Hitler's concentration camps. Catholic themes are woven through all of these books as several of these courageous women talk about their faith—and their rosary beads—in the midst of the horrors of the war.

Continuing the theme, I finally read the hauntingly beautiful *All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr. Published two years ago, this book had been sitting on my shelf for months. It is the tragic story of a blind French girl living in occupied France and a brilliant young German orphan who was recruited to fight for Germany. Their paths cross as he becomes disenchanted with the German cause, and she seeks an ally. I then became curious about whether women had a role in the Resistance during World War I, so I read the engaging *Alice Network* by Kate Quinn. A great novel—based also on a true story—about a woman named Eve Gardiner who is recruited to work as a spy and is sent into enemy-occupied France.

Moving away from historical fiction this month, but wanting to learn more, I purchased Victor Davis Hanson's *The Second World Wars: How the First Global Conflict Was Fought*. As a fan of Hanson's *Carnage and Culture*, a book published several years ago on the “way we fight” in the West, I knew I would find an engaging and informative book about World War II, the most widespread war in history—directly involving more than 100 million people from more than 30 countries.

*Anne Hendershott is professor of sociology and director of the Veritas Center for Ethics in Public Life at Franciscan University of Steubenville.*

*Matthew Cullinan Hoffman:*

I rarely read for pleasure, and I rarely read a book from cover to cover. I tend to use most books for their reference value, and read them for the purpose of gaining some insight into a particular topic I am investigating. I particularly like reference works because I find that they normally deliver more substance per page, and enable me to grasp a topic in its abstract entirety before going on to more thorough research.

Of all such books, the ones I find myself returning to time after time are the works of Aquinas, particularly the *Summa Theologiae* (which is, after all, a manual!), the works of Aristotle, and finally, the great 20th-century manuals of dogmatic theology. Happily, what is probably the best of these manuals, the *Sacrae Theologiae Summa*, was recently translated into English by Father Kenneth Baker, SJ. It therefore joins Ludwig Ott's *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* as one of the most useful English texts a Catholic can read to thoroughly understand his faith. It summarizes with scholastic succinctness, clarity, and rigor the theological consensus of many centuries on an immense number of theological topics, and gives one a snapshot of the state of dogmatics in Catholic seminaries in the decades prior to the 1960s, when rigor was *de rigueur*.

However, two books captured my attention this year enough to lead me to read them much more thoroughly than is my custom. One was Eamon Duffy's monumental historical work, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580*. It contains a rich and detailed account of the process by which the Catholic faith was gradually marginalized and suppressed in England during the Tudor dynasty, largely by way of gradual, Protestantizing liturgical changes that were forced upon the English people by government fiat. The story is a gripping and wrenching read, a vast cultural cataclysm in slow motion, one that made the English church into a tool of state power and gave the monarchs of England an almost dictatorial religious authority over their subjects.

The second work that managed to hold my attention is Father Ralph Wiltgen's *The Rhine Flows into the Tiber*, now republished by TAN as "The Inside Story of Vatican II." I had glanced at the work previously but had never read it thoroughly until I needed it as a source for my commentary on a translation I did this year of the lost schemas of Vatican II that condemned communism.

The book gives one an immensely useful overview of the history of the council from a priest who participated intimately as a journalist and sympathized strongly with the outcome. The story reminds one in many ways of the two recent synods of bishops, in which a minority theological clique sought to impose its own agenda on the Church. However, Wiltgen's book reveals that, in contrast to Pope Francis' synods, the reigning pope through most of Vatican II, Paul VI, was being pushed from below by council commissions whose mentality was far more liberal than his own. This was true in particular in the failure of the council to clearly condemn communism, despite Paul VI's own unequivocal condemnation of the same in his encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* issued in 1964, and despite his attempts to pressure the council to do so in 1965. In another case, part of the council's liberal faction sought to remove a call for government moral censorship of the press from the Decree on the Means of Social Communication, but to no avail—Pope Paul VI supported its passage and signed it with the Church's traditional doctrine intact. The book is filled with accounts such as these that give very valuable insight into the most influential event in late-20th-century Catholicism, and in my view it is well worth the read.

*Matthew Cullinan Hoffman is a Catholic essayist and journalist.*

*Brian Jones:*

***The Fables of Plato: On the Mortal Condition in Shadowy Times***, by Joshua Mitchell

Much of contemporary political science, and political theory more specifically, is inundated by historicism. Simply put, studying the history of political philosophy reveals a perennial truth, namely, that there is no enduring set of perennial truths. Thus, it is not only rare but, even more than this, delightful and refreshing to read this work by Georgetown political theorist Joshua Mitchell. To bring together insights regarding democracy from both Plato and Alexis de Tocqueville can only be achieved by someone who has an acute ability to see the whole picture of things. And Mitchell certainly does. The final section of the book alone is almost a complete education in itself. Mitchell asks his readers to ponder the question of *what will save us*, an inquiry that first arises early in the book.

Plato's answer is that only *philosophy can save us*. The Good that is seen by the philosopher is, upon further examination, the end for which all human beings were made. The human good is not simply the special forte of philosophers; Plato is hoping that his listeners will want to be more philosophical. For Tocqueville, it is *intermediate associations that will save us*. Those local communities of family, church, and neighborhood are the proximate institutions that give meaning and depth to our lives, and which keep us from wanting to be dependent upon that "tutelary" state power. Mitchell says we need both. And, like the good political theorist he is, Mitchell is certainly pointing us in the direction of revelation, that ultimate answer to the question of *what will save us*.

***Democratic Faith***, by Patrick J. Deneen

By most accounts of our present cultural and political discontent, democracy seems more and more under attack. All across the political spectrum, we can witness calls for the strengthening of global democracy. What is needed entails the cultivation of "democratic faith" that was rekindled in the West after 1989. It is to this very narrative that Patrick Deneen's book speaks. Deneen is an astute critic of "democratic faith," but not to the extent that he is licking his chops for democracy's demise. To bring to light the pitfalls and serious temptations of democratic ages is a necessary part of citizenship, and any healthy understanding of our place in this world. Deneen's book excels at showing the full dignity of social and political reflection upon contemporary democracy, without falling prey to the pervasive temptation to see politics and our democratic hopes as the fullest, most complete expression of who we are.

*The Distinctiveness of Christianity*, by James V. Schall

I promise that there is no conspiracy to only recommend books by current, or former, Georgetown political philosophers (Mitchell is currently at Georgetown, while Deneen and Schall were once Hoyas as well). The more one reads Schall, it becomes clearer that he often sees things before the rest of us. He is so often on target. This book is no different. In fact, reading this work seems as if it could simply have been written within in the last year. For Schall, the greatest threat to politics is to break its proper limits, to conceive of it as a pseudo-metaphysics or religion. The other side of this coin has been the destructive effects of religion's politicization. Often times, when the clergy speak, be they priests, bishops, or cardinals, they sound identical to politicians. Schall's position about Christianity is that its distinctiveness rests upon its claim to be true. Its message is not one among others, but states that it most fully tells us what we are as embodied creatures living in this finite world. Perhaps this is why it is continually showing itself to be the main enemy of liberal orthodoxy, as well as of those who want the church to be more like the modern world. Reading Schall might produce a similar effect in our souls as the young Augustine who, after reading Cicero, proclaimed that "you have turned me to Yourself, O Lord." And such is what Schall would want, that we would be turned not to him, but to the truth.

*Brian Jones is Ph.D candidate in Philosophy at the University of St. Thomas in Houston.*

*James Kalb:*

Apart from the Bible and saints' lives, most of the Catholic books I read this year had to do with contentious issues.

The most contentious was *The Dictator Pope*, by the pseudonymous Marcantonio Colonna. I read it shortly after reading several very positive books about Francis and his pontificate, and was ready for something that would round out the favorable interpretations with a compilation of information—mostly publicly available, but some apparently from the author's contacts in the Vatican—that supports more troubling interpretations that can't be shrugged off. As far as I could tell, the book performed its task competently.

Another was *Luther and His Progeny*, edited by John Rao, a collection of a dozen essays by European and American scholars on the man and his movement. The essays are diverse but share a very skeptical perspective regarding their subject that I thought timely in view of the determined efforts to rehabilitate the man and what he did for Catholics.

Whether for escape or for perspective on our current situation, I also read a certain amount of travel-type literature.

The best was *Lost Enlightenment*, by S. Frederick Starr. It's an account of the great age of Central Asia—present-day Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and North-Eastern Iran—between 500 and 1500 AD. The author constantly emphasizes the centrality of the region to the development of civilization, and there's certainly a case for his view.

I also read *Sidelights on Chinese Life*, by the long-time British missionary John MacGowan, which is a fascinating account of life in China shortly before the 1911 revolution. He calls things the way he sees them, presenting both positive and not-so-positive sides of China and her people from the point of view of a European of that time.

I shouldn't call Kay Hymowitz's *The New Brooklyn* travel literature, since it's an account of how the place I live got to be the way it is. Even so, it is worth reading even for non-Brooklynites as an account of a place that is odd in many ways but nonetheless characteristic of where America and the world are today.

And then there were the novels. Some of them include:

*Barchester Towers*, by Anthony Trollope. An account of clerical politicking in an English cathedral town by a man who took the quotidian aspects of life very much to heart. He's well worth a try if you want to read a perceptive writer who finds the ordinary concerns of ordinary people entirely acceptable.

*Fathers and Sons*, by Ivan Turgenev. More about the everydayness of everyday life, infused with the Russian sense that the world goes its own way and nothing can be done about anything or anybody. It includes a good description of the older generation trying to keep up with the times and the younger generation finding it slightly embarrassing.

*The Big Sleep*, by Raymond Chandler. It's a great hard-boiled novel, so it's extremely stylized in an amusing way, and somewhat of a moral tale in a world in which things are not what they seem and not much is moral.

*James Kalb is a lawyer and independent scholar who lives in Brooklyn, New York.*

*Joseph Kremers:*

Much of my research and writing flows from an interest in two things: geography and Russia. I found *Prisoners of Geography* by Tim Marshall (2015) to be a rare find—a pleasurable read carrying a mighty explanatory punch about, well, darn near the entire human experience. If you're curious about how geography shapes political, social, psychological, economic, and cultural realities, this is the book for you. Another book, *The Revenge of Geography* by Robert Kaplan (2012), while a bit more of a slog than Marshall's book, shows the seminal power of geography in international conflict.

Peter Pomerantsev's *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible* (2014) is a skillfully told tale of post-Soviet Russia, the world of new wealth and old corruption, and of the moral squalor at the core of Putin's oligarchy.

The highly praised *Russia and the New World Disorder* by Bobo Lo (2015) is one of the best assessments of the role of Russia's foreign policy under Putin. Excellent, excellent! Don't let the author's name throw you; he is the former head of the Russian and Eurasian Program at the Royal Institute of International Affairs (London), a top-notch think tank for all things Russian.

Everyone's talking about "hybrid war." If you want to get an introduction to how nations "weaponize" economic elements in the struggle for power, read *War by Other Means: Economics and Statecraft*, by Blackwill and Harris (2016). Short version: The US lags far behind in this area, and our neglect puts us in peril.

Getting away from my usual beat, I greatly enjoyed *The Oregon Trail: A New American Journey* (2016), by Rinker Buck. Here the reader gets a twofer: a captivating story of a daring quest and a tale of two brothers, as unlike as can be, discovering new depth in their kinship "on the trail." Lots of insights into the stresses of the original pioneer trek and the claim that that part of America still has on American hearts.

It's always a pleasure to explore the life of perhaps the greatest political figure of the 20th century, Winston S. Churchill. In Candice Millard's *Hero of the Empire* (2016), we meet the young, brash, and thoroughly ambitious Winston, determined to fight in whatever war the British Empire has at the moment on his way to a seat in Parliament and onward to the post of Prime Minister. This is the story of his derring-do in the Boer War, wherein he goes to South Africa as a journalist, leaps into the fighting, is captured, imprisoned, escapes, and returns heroically (of course) to England. Behind his, shall we say, bulldog determination is the devotion of the equally fierce Jennie Jerome, his American-born mother, who shepherds his rise by alternately charming and badgering those who might aid her son's ascent. The book is a testament to the often-heard "you can't make this stuff up."

Finally, I must mention Senator Ben Sasse (R-Neb.) and his book *The Vanishing American Adult* (2017). [I reviewed this one for CWR](#). The senator's critique is of our parenting habits since the 60s, and therefore casts no stones at the young themselves. The critique, which is sharp and on point, is followed by several recommendations for parents who fear the result of letting the secular culture set the educational and moral course in their children's journey to adulthood.

*Joseph Kremers is a political scientist who taught political ideologies, international relations, and Soviet/Russian studies in Oregon for 28 years.*

*Derya M. Little:*

The unexpected gem of this year was doubtlessly *The Noonday Devil: Acedia, the Unnamed Evil of Our Times* by Jean-Charles Nault, OSB. Even though this mortal sin is rarely mentioned in today's Catholic circles, Nault explains why it is possibly the biggest evil of our age. Acedia, the loss of joy of one's salvation, a sin against charity, affects our daily lives, our families, and in the end our Church. Becoming aware of how acedia affects my own life made this book one of the best spiritual reads of my short Catholic life. Unless it is the Bible or *The Lord of the Rings*, I don't read books twice, but Nault's books will remain on my reading list every year.

Being a convert inevitably makes other conversion stories attractive. I find a renewed sense of hope and joy when I read about someone else's encounter with Christ. In *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*, Nabeel Qureshi (who passed away recently, R.I.P.) chronicles his life as a Muslim growing up in America and his journey to Christ through a Protestant friend who was willing to challenge him. His research about the Quran, the Bible, and Muhammed not only sheds light on basic beliefs of Muslims, but gives an idea about what it means to grow up in the US but still maintain an exclusively Muslim identity. Qureshi's other book, *Answering Jihad*, makes the argument that the Good News of Christ is the only permanent solution to the menace that stems from Islam. Both books renewed my belief that only a strong Church can stand against the tide of Islam.

In this misguided world that only talks about mercy at the expense of justice, *By Man Shall His Blood Be Shed* by Edward Feser and Joseph Bessette explores the philosophical and theological roots of the Church's traditional teaching on capital punishment. Their arguments

from natural law and history were especially enlightening. It is the book to read if you want to appreciate why the mercy of Christ can only be exalted by a proper understanding of his justice.

Being a non-native speaker makes certain genres harder to read than others. Poetry is certainly the most challenging. However, this year two poetry books made it to my reading list by happenstance, and led me to appreciate the flow of the English language more—even though Turkish poems are still easier to follow. The first one is a collection of fantasy poems by Michael Fantina, *Alchemy of Dreams and Other Poems*, which makes fantastical creatures come alive with a masterful use of textures and senses. Christopher Villiers' *Petals of Vision* was also a feast of rhymes, lyrics, and emotions, with the occasional touch of satire. Maybe it is high time I read the Bard in his original language.

Last but not least, even though technically it is not a book, St. Thomas' *De Rationibus Fidei* was a helpful read in trying to explain to Muslims the Incarnation, Trinity, and Crucifixion. Since the Muslim understanding of Allah is not compatible with these principal beliefs of Christianity, one needs an alternative approach to communicate the nature God and the necessity of the Incarnation for salvation. The Angelic Doctor does not disappoint.

*Derya M. Little is the author of From Islam to Christ: One Woman's Path through the Riddles of God.*

*Timothy D. Lusch:*

I love books, lists, and *Catholic World Report*—in that order. Sorry, Carl. So this is a real treat. As usual, I read widely and rather recklessly this year. I started more than I finished, though I finish what I start eventually (I've been reading a Trollope novel for 15 years). I am never bored and I never have enough time to read. My wife and I built a library in our new home where all our books are together for the first time. I do not expect to be seen in public again.

I read Ryszard Legutko's *The Demon in Democracy: Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies* straight through without coming up for air. An enormously important book by a profoundly important thinker, Legutko exposes what lies beneath our politics. Hint: it's not angelic.

Norman Ohler's *Blitzed: Drugs in the Third Reich* is an exceptionally well researched book about the pervasiveness of drugs in Nazi Germany. Ohler's research into the extent of drug use in the German Army is revelatory and helps explain, in part, early German successes during the blitzkrieg of 1940. But he also chronicles drug use among civilians and reevaluates Hitler's habit in light his doctor's medical records.

Keeping with positive, uplifting narratives, I read Larry Lehmer's *The Day the Music Died: The Last Tour of Buddy Holly, the Big Bopper, and Richie Valens*. Lehmer chases down just about every person involved in the Winter Dance Party tour of 1959 and reveals the riveting story behind the demise of the doomed musicians. A tragedy, sure, but man, was it fun to read.

Candace Millard's *Destiny of the Republic: A Tale of Madness, Medicine, and the Murder of a President* was never on my list. All I knew about President James Garfield was that he was assassinated and, most of the time, I confused his killer with the guy who shot President McKinley. Not anymore; not after this book. Millard is an excellent researcher and gifted storyteller. And what a whopper this story is. For weeks after I read it loved ones avoided me because it was all I talked about.

*Lost Horizon* by James Hilton (of *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* fame) is a wonderful, dreamlike adventure story that follows a group of foreigners in the mythical Himalayan utopia of Shangri-La. But not everyone is pleased, and not everything is as it seems. This is also true of H.P. Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness*. Lovecraft's prose is a bit stilted and baggy at times but it is a small price to pay to be totally creeped out. I read his descriptions of the frigid and unforgiving Antarctic landscape while smoking a cigar in the summer sun.

The landscapes of France and the human face take center stage in *David Jones: A Fusilier at the Front*, a wonderful collection of sketches drawn by the artist and poet David Jones while fighting in the trenches of The Great War. Jones is little known next to Sassoon, Owen, and other War Poets, but his work shows us a man both profoundly human and Catholic, and shows us that to be truly one is to be truly both.

Elmore Leonard is best known for books like *Get Shorty*, *Be Cool*, and *Tishomingo Blues*, but *The Moonshine War* is not to be missed. Bootlegging, hill folk, and good old-fashioned shoot-'em-ups as only Leonard can do it. His dialogue crackles with life. Best read sober.

*Timothy D. Lusch is an attorney and writer.*

Joseph F. Martin:

*The Lord's Prayer* and *Our Hearts Are Restless* are two forgotten 1970s Frank Sheed titles mocked up by Seabury Press to look like paperback coffee table items. Created in collusion with photographer Catherine Hughes, they show their age but have also worn well. Her black-and-white images recall the serendipity-style cover treatments for Tyndale's old *The Way* and *Reach Out* Bibles; Sheed's prose revives appreciation for the artful applicatory style of one of last century's outstanding orators.

Eric Metaxas' *Martin Luther* is a fine if biased pop bio that scores its points in rapid succession. Andrew Pettegree's *Brand Luther* confirms G.K. Chesterton's intuitive if time-bound impression of the German as precursor to the twin cults of print and personality. Jared Wicks' *Luther & His Spiritual Legacy* suggests that Jesuits are hardly all cut from the same cloth. And Maisie Ward's *Pagan France?* reminds readers that Catholics have had their own populist and problematic reformers.

Fulton J. Sheen's *Philosophy of Science* gives counterblast to the contention that *religionistas* have been the historical roadblocks to inquiry or progress. *The Last Castle*, by Denise Kiernan, tells the story of Asheville's Biltmore House and provokes a whole new appreciation of the home renovation craze. Tim Keller's *Proverbs* proves once more that Evangelicals do devotionals right.

Joe Hagan's *Sticky Fingers* tells the story of the ruling class at *Rolling Stone* magazine. Armond White's *Rebel for the Hell of It* tackles the legacy of enduring rap icon Tupac Shakur. Wilfrid Sheed's *Max Jamison* lampoons the life of an uppity arts critic, while Evelyn Waugh's *The Life of the Right Reverend Ronald Knox* rightly retains an admiring stance. And Rob Long's *Bigly* makes hay out of our El Presidente's rhetorical flights and flops.

Finally, a tip of the hat to a few musicians whose 2017 flourishes felt inspired. Plain white rapper KJ-52 and pop folkie Bethany Barnard each score from different directions: *Jonah* (his) and *A Better Word* (hers) both suggest that CCM as a marketplace genre hasn't given up the ghost quite yet. Rocker John Mark McMillan also rattles some CCM house rafters on *Mercury & Lightning*. Elsewhere—from a genre that used to be set apart by vinyl bin dividers tagged “Adult Contemporary”—Burt Bacharach and Tonio K.'s *Original Demos* sounds like a batch of gems excavated from A&M Records' 60s studio vaults. And Slaughter Beach, Dog's performance on *motorcycle.jpg*—a quirky conjuring feat that feels cut from a soundtrack project crossing Josh Schwartz's series *The OC* with the Coen Bros.' *Inside Llewyn Davis*—induces in me some sort of arrested indie hipster flashback. It also delivers what may be the year's single best line: “Details for a new protest / Adorn white printer paper flyers / She says, ‘I feel so old admitting / counter-culture makes me tired.’” Can I get an “amen,” somebody?

Joseph F. Martin is a professor of communication and rhetoric at Hampton University in Virginia.

Filip Mazurczak:

I began and ended 2017 with Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. I read his last book-length interview with Peter Seewald, *Last Testament*, in January and his *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives* in December. Both were a reminder that the Church and world were blessed to have had such a brilliant intellectual with a tender heart as pope for eight years. The first book was the pope-emeritus' perspective on his direct experience of the dramatic history of the Church and of his native Germany in the 20th century, including his childhood in then arch-Catholic Bavaria in the shadow of the Third Reich, as well as Vatican II, the pontificate of St. John Paul II, and, finally, his own historic pontificate. *The Infancy Narratives*, meanwhile, is an erudite reflection on Jesus' birth and childhood incorporating theology, philosophy, history, and astronomy that made for great Advent reading.

While Nikos Kazantzakis, Greece's greatest modern writer, proved controversial to many Christians, his writing reveals a restless, anxious soul in constant pursuit of the truth who had great respect for Jesus Christ and his teachings. I read several of his novels this past year, which marked the 60th anniversary of his death. Of particular interest to our readers should be *The Greek Passion*, a philosophically and theologically rich tale of a Greek village that stages a passion play every seven years. Various villagers are chosen to play the figures from the Gospel narrative, including Christ, and in their everyday lives they begin to resemble the characters they will portray. Meanwhile, a group of refugees from a Greek village burned to the ground by the Turks settles in nearby Mount Sarakina. They are led by the saintly, ascetic Priest Fotis, who is contrasted with the greedy, heartless local Priest Grigoris, who must rank alongside Moliere's Tartuffe as one of literature's most unpleasant religious hypocrites.

Also worth reading is Kazantzakis' last novel, *The Fratricides*, set during Greece's civil war. Its protagonist is Father Yannaros, an Orthodox priest whose son has joined the communist rebels (the communists and nationalists are depicted as equally cruel). Wandering a blood-soaked Greek countryside, Yannaros unsuccessfully appeals to his countrymen to follow Christ's teaching and love rather than kill each other. The novel also deals with theodicy: Yannaros often questions his faith amid the cruelty around him, yet he always ends his doubts by yelling, “Get thee behind me, Satan!”

French journalist Guillame Zeller has done all interested in Church history a great service by writing *The Priest Barracks: Dachau, 1938-*

1945, which Ignatius Press has recently published in English. Zeller movingly recreates the Cross borne by the approximately 2,700 clergymen from all over German-occupied Europe, the vast majority of whom were Catholic, who were imprisoned in the oldest Nazi concentration camp. While suffering hunger, medical experiments, sadistic guards and kapos, and typhus epidemics, these priests clung to their faith, giving truly saintly witness.

In recent years, as advances in medical technology have made resuscitation increasingly common, there has been great interest in near-death experiences, as evidenced by the lucrative industry of bestselling books on the topic. While this topic has renewed public debate on the existence of God and the meaning of life, it has received surprisingly little attention from theologians. The great Italian Catholic journalist Antonio Socci has written a fine book that not only examines the validity of the claims of those who claim to have tasted the afterlife and returned, but also interprets them from the perspective of Catholic doctrine and compares them to the texts of well-known Catholic mystics. His *Tornati dall'aldilà* ("Those Who Have Returned from the Afterlife") should be translated into English.

Filip Mazurczak is the assistant editor of the European Conservative.

Dorothy Cummings McLean:

Once again my new year's resolution was to read a new-to-me book a week, but fell short by nine.

It was a year in which hospital waiting rooms featured hugely, but I found that the works of Elizabeth David—Britain's Julia Child—were cheery and interesting enough to distract me from worry as I waited. *French Provincial Cooking*, *Summer Cooking* and *An Omelette and a Glass of Wine* were all great comforts.

The best novel I read was Boleslaw Prus's *Lalka* ("The Doll"), beautifully translated by David Welsh. It tells the tale of an ambitious Warsaw merchant, Stanisław Wolkulski, and the aristocratic beauty Izabela Łęcka, who wants nothing to do with him. It is also a splendidly detailed pen portrait of the Moscow-ruled part of Poland in 1878. Prus (or Aleksander Głowacki, his real name) is sometimes called "the Polish Chekov," but *The Doll* reminds me more of Charles Dickens, for its detail, and Fyodor Dostoevsky, for its investigations into the human condition.

Another Polish book that grabbed my attention was *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, a collection of short stories by Tadeusz Borowski, a survivor of both Auschwitz and Dachau, translated by Barbara Vedder and Michael Kandel. Borowski's tales are absolutely blistering, for he describes the hatred prisoners vented on each other in their desperation to survive. If you loved Roberto Begnini's film *Life is Beautiful*, you will hate *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*.

The best contemporary novel I read was *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid. Told as a monologue to an American traveler in Lahore, it is the story of a naive Pakistani student who goes to Princeton and falls in love with America, symbolized by the beautiful and talented Erica. He feels torn between his family in Pakistan and his life in the USA, until 9/11 changes everything. I highly recommend this book as an antidote to the general fear of young Muslim men you may have developed thanks to 16 years of some young Muslim men behaving like homicidal psychopaths.

Meanwhile, the most interesting Catholic books I read were *The Benedict Option* by Rod Dreher; *Noble Beauty, Transcendent Holiness* by Peter Kwasniewski; and *The Power of Silence* by Cardinal Sarah. All argue for something (fleeing from the world; traditional liturgies and devotions; contemplative prayer), and all are very well-written, if not (in my case) life-changing.

No, I take that back. Before I read *The Benedict Option*, I felt sad and frustrated to have been stuck in the Catholic ghetto for over a decade. After I read *The Benedict Option*, I realized that this was not only inevitable, it is desirable. So thank you very much, Mr. Dreher. Kwasniewski's and Sarah's splendid books, in contrast, merely made my own deeply held beliefs seem even more attractive.

Dorothy Cummings McLean is a Canadian writer living abroad.

Father David Vincent Meconi, SJ:

Brad Miner, *The Compleat Gentleman: The Modern Man's Guide to Chivalry*. Teaching undergraduate men, I have come to see how much they can learn by being introduced to what chivalry is all about, becoming the "fiercest in battle, and meekest in hall."

Julian Carron, *Disarming Beauty*. Echoing *Fides et Ratio*, Carron's 16 essays prove that the Church really is the final protector of social

liberties, the use of human reason, and the need for ultimate beauty.

Ryszard Legutko, *The Demon in Democracy: Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies* . If you have ever wondered why communist and fascist leaders were woven so seamlessly into the liberal democracies that replaced them, this Polish philosopher has the answers.

Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* . This is a must-read for any of us trying to interact with the iGen who have forgotten to look up from their devices.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, *Called To Holiness: On Love, Vocation, and Formation* . Here is an unmatched collection of letters to seminarians and women religious in formation by someone we all miss very, very much.

Fr. David Vincent Meconi, SJ is associate professor of historical theology as well as the director of the new Catholic Studies Center at Saint Louis University; he is also the editor of *Homiletic & Pastoral Review*.

Sandra Miesel:

If you aren't all "Reformationed out" by this time, I recommend these recent titles (in alphabetical order) from my groaning bookshelves:

Eamon Duffy, *Saints, Sacrilege & Seditious: Religion and Conflict in Tudor Reformations* . This collection of articles by a leading Catholic historian covers Reformation myths, changes to the material culture of church buildings, the work of Cardinals Fisher and Pole, among other topics.

Carlos M.N. Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World 1450-1650* . This is the book to get if you're getting only one, a sweeping survey of current consensus on the period with huge bibliography. Yes, it's a weighty tome but well worth it.

Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* . We are still living with the consequences of 16th-century events.

Lyndal Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet*. This vivid, even-handed portrait starts right from the very beginning, with life in Luther's dismal hometown.

Kirst Stjerna, *Women and the Reformation* . Often neglected in older histories, female reformers, intellectuals, rulers—and resisters—get sympathetic attention here.

Of course, I did read about other topics from time to time this past year:

Michael Burleigh, *Sacred Causes: The Clash of Religion and Politics from the Great War to the War on Terror* . If you enjoy this bracing gallop through the maze of recent history, do try the same author's *Earthly Powers: The Clash of Religion and Politics from the French Revolution to the Great War*.

Orlando Figes, *Revolutionary Russia 1891-1991: A History*. This is the compact version of Figes' monumental *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924*. He reveals depths of misery you may never have imagined before, during, and after the Bolsheviks took over Russia.

William Kilpatrick, *Christianity and Atheism: The Struggle for the Future of the West* . If you've wondered why secularists are so soft on Islam, Kilpatrick offers some answers that will have you reaching for your rosary.

*Called to be Children of God: The Catholic Theology of Human Deification* , edited by David Meconi and Carl E. Olson. The editors and other scholarly contributors expound the dazzling concept of *theosis*, showing that it belongs as much to the Western Church as to the Eastern.

Sandra Miesel is an American medievalist and writer.

Christopher S. Morrissey:

Although the rules of participation in this symposium do not require it, I still impose the following limitations on myself: all of the books for my list must have been published in 2017; and I also strive to restrict myself to only 10 books. However, this year I did expand "only

10" to the friendlier imperial system's "baker's dozen" (i.e., 12, plus a 13th bonus extra).

I wanted to include Robert Sokolowski's *Moral Action*, but although it was republished in 2017 by Catholic University of America Press, it was actually first published in 1985 by Indiana University Press. (Read CWR's fine review [here](#).)

Therefore, I will start my list instead with my favorite book from 2017: Edward Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God* (Ignatius Press). Feser's book is more original and more significant than people realize. Maybe it's because I myself have been working on the logical formalization of various proofs, but Feser rigorously shows the connection of God's existence with traditional divine attributes in a very helpful way.

I wish that Feser's natural theology book was getting more attention than his backwards-looking book on the death penalty. On that issue, I am more convinced by the prophetic approach of Johannes Ude, *You Shall Not Kill* (Wipf & Stock, 2016), which I read early in 2017. In any case, my deeper appreciation of the mimetic theory of René Girard has slowly changed my thinking on these and related issues. Anthony W. Bartlett, *Seven Stories: How to Study and Teach the Nonviolent Bible* (Hopetime Press), shows how Girard's ideas can enrich our understanding of the Scriptures. And David Humbert, *Violence in the Films of Alfred Hitchcock: A Study in Mimesis* (Michigan State University Press), shows how they can even enrich the practice of things like film studies.

Speaking of movies, Kevin Miller's documentary *Hellbound?* (2012) was informed by Girardian analysis; now, five years later, people he met while making his film (including me) contribute chapters to *Hellrazed?*, reflecting on the state of a theological debate that has many Protestants reconsidering their eschatologies.

Being the Catholic that I am, Erasmus was on my mind a lot this year, given the Reformation's 500th anniversary. I most enjoyed the enlightening book from Ross Dealy, *The Stoic Origins of Erasmus' Philosophy of Christ* (University of Toronto Press). But then late in the year came the thoughtful meditations of Ron Dart, *Erasmus: Wild Bird*.

As usual, Roger Scruton published indispensable books. I especially liked *On Human Nature* (Princeton University Press), but maybe what we need most in the current political moment is *Conservatism* (Profile Books), to remind us what that political philosophy actually is. Trump and the GOP are bent on destroying the meaning of the word in America for a generation or more, but human nature will necessitate the rediscovery of its true meaning at some point.

For the contemplation of politics in a wider historical context, perhaps the best way to begin is with Moshe Halbertal and Stephen Holmes, *The Beginning of Politics: Power in the Biblical Book of Samuel* (Princeton University Press). I also was convinced by the argument of Erica Benner in *Be Like the Fox: Machiavelli's Lifelong Quest for Freedom* (Penguin).

That's ten, but here are three more of 2017's very best: Dennis R. Venema and Scot McKnight, *Adam and the Genome: Reading Scripture after Genetic Science* (Brazos Press); Sister Prudence Allen, RSM, *The Concept of Woman, Volume 3: The Search for Communion of Persons, 1500-2015* (Eerdmans); and J. Budziszewski, *Commentary on Thomas Aquinas's Virtue Ethics* (Cambridge University Press).

*Christopher S. Morrissey teaches Greek and Latin on the Faculty of Philosophy at the Seminary of Christ the King at Westminster Abbey in Mission, BC. He also lectures in logic and philosophy at Trinity Western University.*

*Ines A. Murzaku:*

When I started my academic career, I remember my father, himself an academic, saying: Welcome to the profession. From now on you will read more books within your narrow specialty than leisure reading. This is true; as I have matured in my academic vocation, I feel I have been informed and maybe deformed by reading more books within my own field of specialization and expertise. However, over the last year my interests have expanded in areas of contemporary Church history and theology.

I am writing a book entitled *Mother Teresa, The Saint of the Peripheries Who Became Catholicism's Center Piece*, to be published by Paulist Press. Staying true to the book's title and the main argument—"the peripheries"—I am planning to bring the most "peripheral" scholarly publications and research to "the center." The books are published in Albanian, Italian, Arbëresh, and Macedonian. These are a few authors and books I have been reading this past year:

Lush Gjergji—*Nëna Tereze – Shenjtëresha e Dashurisë* and *Nëna Tereze – Dashuria në veprim*—both books focus on the life and mission of Mother Teresa and her early life and education in Scopje in an Albanian family. *Ho Conosciuto una Santa – Madre Teresa di Calcutta* and *Padre Pio e Madre Teresa*, both written by Cardinal Angelo Comastri, and Andrea Riccardi's *Periferie. Crisi e novità per la Chiesa* are all books highly recommended.

Moreover, in the last five years I have been teaching the Senior Seminar in Catholic Studies to our Catholic Studies graduating seniors.

The seminar has given me the opportunity to read and explore the best and the most current Catholic thinkers. This is what I have been reading and discussing this past year:

Cardinal Sarah, *The Power of Silence, Against the Dictatorship of Noise*, an extraordinary reflection by Cardinal Sarah responding to questions by French journalist Nicolas Diat. In this book, Sarah makes specific reference to monastic life and silence as lived in a monastic setting where “men and women who enter into the silence offer themselves as a holocaust for their brethren.” However, the book is not intended for monastics, as “cloisters are not the only places where we can seek God.” God can be found in the everyday life if one discipline himself/herself to taking silence seriously. Silence is beneficial and more powerful than noise; practicing silence one can connect with self and others. This is what Cardinal Sarah calls a connected and connecting silence. The point and the take-home message is that silence and God can be found in the workplace, college dorm, home—we all need time to reflect and pray in silence, and “once we have acquired interior silence, we can transport it with us into the world to pray everywhere.”

Cardinal Sarah’s *God or Nothing* provides an analysis of Cardinal Sarah’s own upbringing and his journey to God in his native Africa. It is a journey the cardinal graciously shares with his readers. Sarah speaks with much wisdom, appreciation, and gratitude for his African roots, the poor and the marginalized he had left behind in Africa. I believe this is the book every serious Catholic needs to read in order to understand the universality of the Catholic faith, Church teaching, and how to live a spiritual life.

Archbishop Charles Caput’s *Strangers in a Strange Land* is a rich, thought-provoking book which uses a wide variety of scholarly sources. The book is clear and to the point, witty and gentle, and the arguments are articulated and argued competently. The book ends with a message of hope and remedy.

The fact that Rodney Stark’s *Bearing False Witness* is written by a non-Catholic scholar and academic in defense of the Catholic Church makes the book particularly interesting. Prof. Stark argues with scholarly lucidity, logic, and reliable sources against common misconceptions of the Catholic Church. The book is very helpful to Catholics and non-Catholics alike. I would recommend it to anybody who seeks to rise above the anti-Catholic bias.

*Ines A.i Murzaku is professor of Church history and director of the Catholic Studies Program at Seton Hall University in New Jersey.*

*Thomas J. Nash:*

The fall of 1985 was a heady, formative, and foretelling time for me as a budding reporter and Catholic apologist. I was in my last semester of grad school in journalism at the University of Missouri. I had known about Mother Angelica, who launched the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) in 1981, but I was very excited that a new and much bigger audience would learn about the nun and her network through her **60 Minutes** interview with Morley Safer, **which aired in October** 1985. I was able to meet Mother the following year, while working as a reporter for the CBS affiliate in Montgomery, Alabama, interviewed her for *Lay Witness Magazine* in 1995, and then went on to work for EWTN as a theology advisor from 2007-2015. Because I now speak on the Catholic network foundress and her theology of suffering, I had occasion this year to revisit Raymond Arroyo’s *Mother Angelica: The Remarkable Story of a Nun, Her Nerve, and a Network of Miracles* (Doubleday, 2005), which remains the standard reference work on Mother and her life—particularly all she did and endured to establish and sustain EWTN.

Also in the fall of 1985, I learned of Karl Keating, who began a memorable 30-part apologetics series in the September 26 issue of *The Wanderer*. Keating’s articles would become the basis of the bestselling *Catholicism and Fundamentalism: The Attack on “Romanism” by “Bible Christians”* (Ignatius Press, 1988), an outstanding apologetics resource and another fine book to which I’ve returned in 2017—this time in researching and writing my own book, *What Did Jesus Do: The Biblical Roots of the Catholic Church* (Incarnate Word Media, 2017).

In founding Catholic Answers and writing *Catholicism and Fundamentalism*, Keating sparked a modern revival in Catholic apologetics. Thirty years later in *Booked for Life: The Bibliographic Memoir of an Accidental Apologist* (Catholic Answers Press, 2017), Keating has provided a distillation of apologetics wisdom from the tomes that shaped him most. The author provides highlights from Blessed John Henry Newman’s *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Frank Sheed’s *Theology and Sanity*, and B.C. Butler’s *The Church and Infallibility*, among others. Keating emphasizes the importance of teaching authority in biblical apologetics, “the evidentiary power of history” in any apologetics endeavor, and that, in contrast to when Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen commented in 1938, there are today millions of people who hate the Catholic Church for what she *actually* teaches, “particularly [her] moral teachings.” As a contributing apologist for Catholic Answers and now also a member of the apostolate’s Speakers Bureau, I found Keating’s memoir to be a handbook of apologetics perspicacity, and an encouragement to grow further in holiness to better advance the Church’s Great Commission in our troubled times (see Mt. 28:18-20).

Finally, in *The Spirit of Father Damien: The Leper Priest—A Saint for Our Times* (Ignatius Press, 2010), Jan De Volder provides arguably the best-researched biography on the Belgian Ambassador to Hawaii’s island of exiles. There are moments when De Volder missteps, such as misidentifying Mormons as Christians, but he undoubtedly captures the spirit of Father Damien, who, in the words of Pope Francis,

gladly gained “the smell of his sheep,” figuratively and literally, as he became one with them unto death. What was the leper priest’s secret to transforming Molokai’s miasma of misery? Daily Mass and Eucharistic adoration. “Without the Blessed Sacrament, a situation like mine would be untenable,” Father Damien wrote his brother back in Europe. “But with our Lord at my side, I’m always joyful and content.” “By giving himself completely to a small band of outcasts on a godforsaken piece of island,” De Volder summarizes, “he became a figure emanating a universal power of attraction.”

*Thomas J. Nash is a research associate at Ave Maria Radio, a contributing apologist for Catholic Answers, and a contributing blogger for the National Catholic Register.*

*Carl E. Olson:*

One of the very best books I (re)read in 2017 was from The Good Book: *The Gospel of Luke*. It is the current focus of the weekly Bible study I’ve taught at our parish since 2000, having already led studies through the other three Gospels (as well as many other books of the Bible). Luke demonstrates a remarkable combination of erudition (his Greek is considered the finest in the New Testament), theological sophistication, rigorous research, compositional genius, and, I think, a deep and dry sense of humor. At almost every study I am stuck again by how Jesus is shown to be a the startling, scandalous Messiah and Savior who offers mercy while making radical, unbudging demands (cf. Lk. 9:23-27, 57-62; 12:8-12, etc). There is nothing saccharine or qualified about his call, his mission, and his demands. That fits very well with Ulrich L Lehner’s short and powerful *God Is Not Nice: Rejecting Pop Culture Theology and Discovering the God Worth Living*, which offers a charitable but clear-eyed called to Catholics to reject the shallow, dull, and self-serving images of God (or “god”) that dominant the cultural landscape. Highly recommended.

I’m still working through it, but Larry W. Hurtado’s recent book *Destroyer of the gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World* is an illuminating study of what made the first Christians stand out in the pagan world: their exclusive worship of Jesus Christ. It not only offers historical perspective, it is a challenge to witness in a pluralistic world that is increasingly neo-pagan and certainly more and more anti-Christian.

Three of Glenn W. Olsen’s most recent books have occupied significant chunks of my reading time: *On the Road to Emmaus: The Catholic Dialogue with America and Modernity*, *The Turn to Transcendence: The Role of Religion in the Twenty-First Century*, and *Supper at Emmaus: Great Themes in Western Culture and Intellectual History*. Olsen has written much for *Communio* and various academic journals over the years and is not well known in more popular circles, which is unfortunate because he is a brilliant historian who knows his theology and who writes with crisp, measured elegance. His “take” on the American Experiment cannot be boiled down to a few words, but he argues with great rigor that the United States is far more indebted to the Enlightenment than many Christians know or want to admit, and that Catholicism in the U.S. faces challenges that go far deeper than the ordinary “left-right” divides that dominate the headlines.

Some of those themes are taken in up riotous polemical fashion (and that’s a compliment) by Anthony Esolen in *Out of the Ashes: Rebuilding American Culture*, which is nothing if not a deep bucket of ice over the reader’s metaphorical head. Esolen has been accused by some of nostalgia, which is nonsense; he is simply guilty of making commonsensical comparisons and drawing out logical conclusions, often to devastating effect. Bracing stuff. Meanwhile, Archbishop Charles J. Chaput’s *Strangers in a Strange Land: Living the Catholic Faith in a Post-Christian World* is a more sedate, but perhaps equally devastating, critique of the current American landscape, rooted in the widely read and deeply considered vision of the leading intellectual among the U.S. bishops. Chaput is first a pastor, but also a first-rate cultural critic (the two really should go hand-in-hand, shouldn’t they?), and eschews sensationalism in favor of a focused diagnostic approach that reminds me, at times, of Walker Percy.

James Matthew Wilson seems to write a brilliant book each year; in 2017 it was *The Vision of the Soul: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty in the Western Tradition*, which is a rather unusual book: a work of philosophical reflection that addresses politics and culture primarily through the arts, especially poetry and literature. Of course, Wilson is a fabulous poet, but he is also a true conservative intellectual, rooted in Plato, Augustine, Aquinas, Eliot, Kirk, and Maritain, which is probably why he’s not yet been on FOX News.

Brad Gregory’s popular work *Rebel in the Ranks: Martin Luther, the Reformation, and the Conflicts That Continue to Shape Our World*, which is blue collar version his longer work *The Unintended Reformation*, is brisk, often surprising, and always compelling. When it comes to Luther, Gregory is not a hater or a fan; he is the destroyer of myths, and the reader is better off for it. I attended a lecture recently by Gregory, which was based squarely on the book, and it was educational and enjoyable, especially since Gregory has a delightful sense of humor.

*Several short sentences about writing* by Verlyn Klinkenborg is one of the more unusual books I’ve read about writing. It helped me think about writing in fresh ways, and also offered some practical pointers that will certainly prove helpful. And I’ve just started reading Marilyn McEntyre’s *Caring for Words in a Culture of Lies*, which reminds me, in places, of Josef Pieper’s fabulous little book *Abuse of Language, Abuse of Power*. McEntyre, who is an Evangelical, is a winsome writer and educator, whose love for rhetorical clarity and beautiful writing is quite inspiring. And speaking of beautiful writing, Simon Leys’ *The Halls of Uselessness: Collected Essays*, offers dazzling, penetrating essays on Don Quixote, Chesterton, China, Waugh, education, and much more.

Finally, on a lighter note, any new book by Will Friedwald is a gift to music lovers, and *The Great Jazz and Pop Vocal Albums* does not

disappoint. Friedwald is both quite opinionated and completely in command of his subject; even when I disagree with him or wonder why Julie London didn't make the cut, I thoroughly enjoy myself, as the countless details, many anecdotes, and sheer exuberance never cease in quantity or quality.

Since I work for Ignatius Press, I've left many fine books off my list. But I should note that Cardinal Robert Sarah's book *The Power of Silence*, mentioned here by several contributors, was one of the most memorable and gripping books I read this year. A spiritual classic.

*Carl E. Olson is the editor of Catholic World Report .*

*Brian O'Neel:*

**Stalin: The History of a Dictator** – Author H. Montgomery Hyde doesn't have to try and make the late Soviet dictator reprehensible. The facts about "Uncle Joe" do that well enough on their own. What Hyde does do is note the discrepancies in Stalin's official biography. A good, honest, and even fair account of this fascinating, historically significant man.

**Defenders of the Unborn: The Pro-Life Movement Before Roe v. Wade**, by Daniel K. Williams – Williams does an excellent job of showing the breadth and power of the pre-Roe pro-life movement. When one realizes how likely it is that pro-life forces would have won the day had not the Supreme Court intervened in 1973, it is honestly somewhat depressing. He finishes the book with a good overview of the post-Roe pro-life landscape.

**The Smile of a Ragpicker: The Life of Satoko Kitahara, Convert and Servant of the Slums of Tokyo** – Few have ever heard of this Japanese Servant of God. Yet her remarkable holiness makes her deserve to be better known. An inspiring read from beginning to end.

**The Millionaire Messenger** – Author Brendon Burchard is one of the leading experts in, well, the field of experts. This book is a short, easy-to-read aid to putting one's expertise to use in the marketplace. It is nothing if not thought provoking.

**The Iron Trail** – This book came out in 1913 and for those interested in good fiction, it stands the test of time. It is a fictionalized account of the building of the Million Dollar Bridge (aka, Miles Glacier Bridge) near Cordova, Alaska. Copper was king in early 20th-century Alaska. The problem, however, was how to move it from the rugged and often dangerous interior to sea ports and from there the world. One of the biggest obstacles was the Copper River, which needed to be traversed with a bridge. But how does one keep a bridge from being destroyed by huge flows of ice that sloughed off from glaciers each year? Author Rex Beach tells the tale of how a team of dedicated engineers and workmen overcame Mother Nature to build a bridge that still stands 100-plus years later. I'm proud to say that my great-great grandfather A.C. O'Neel—who appears as the character "Parker"—prominently features among them. Beach was a masterful storyteller, and more than once I found myself surprised at just how gripping I found his descriptive way with words to be. He had me engrossed in some of the novel's episodes.

*Brian O'Neel writes from Wisconsin.*

*Dr. Jared Ortiz:*

**The World of Jeeves**, by P.G. Wodehouse. For various reasons, this past semester was particularly intense, and Wodehouse was my go-to every almost evening to decompress. These stories are delightful: they are comedies in the sense that they are averted tragedies, but they are always averted. Jeeves is Sherlock Holmes in a world where the peace of Eden can still be felt.

**Parenting Toward the Kingdom: Orthodox Christian Principles of Childrearing**, by Philip Mamalakis. I am generally suspicious of this whole genre, but as my kids get older, I realize that I am more and more in need of wisdom I do not possess. This book contains it in spades. Sensible, practical, deeply Christian, this book didn't just give advice about how to handle kids, but made me want to be a better person.

**The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature**, by Leon Kass. Kass is one of the wisest and most morally serious men alive. Starting with metabolism and ending in the sanctified eating envisioned in the Levitical dietary laws, this book is a compelling phenomenological account of what it means to be human.

**Called to Love: Approaching John Paul II's Theology of the Body**, by Carl Anderson and Jose Granados. This is a beautiful book which introduces the major themes of the Theology of the Body through John Paul II's poetry and plays. I like Christopher West's *Theology of the Body for Beginners*, which I use in one of my classes when I teach the Catholic understanding of sex, but the Anderson/Granados book is superior. It is theologically richer, offers a fuller anthropology, and is less focused on sex (which makes it more or less useful given one's context).

*The Pedagogy of Innocent Suffering*, by Blessed Carlo Gnocchi. I had not heard of Blessed Carlo until this year when a friend recommended I read this little treatise for a course I was preparing on theological anthropology and disability. Gnocchi was a WWI chaplain who was called “the apostle to the amputees.” He speaks from experience and with eloquence about why there is suffering, what it means, how to offer it up to God, and how to teach others to do the same, especially the innocent children whose suffering is most Christ-like.

*Dr. Jared Ortiz is Assistant Professor of Religion at Hope College in Holland, Michigan.*

*William L. Patenaude:*

In nonfiction, my winner for 2017 is *The Power of Silence* (Ignatius Press) by Cardinal Robert Sarah. If you’re familiar with the cardinal’s views on liturgy, you’ll understand the importance of this book—this topic—not just on how we live, but how we worship.

Cardinal Sarah writes: “Silence and solitude are a small anticipation of eternity, when we will be in God’s presence permanently, irradiated by him, the great Silent One, because he is the great lover.”

The book is filled with such passages. These sorts of observations make it, in my mind, one of the most important texts added of late to the life of the Church.

In fiction, I recommend *Speaker for the Dead* (Tor Books), by Orson Scott Card. The story continues a series about a young boy, Ender, whose brilliance is used many years in the future for genocide. *Speaker for the Dead* takes place thousands of years after that, but even with all this backstory, a novice to this world (like me) can dive in fresh. In part this is because the human race, now spread throughout the galaxy in the sixth millennium, maintains many of the faiths we know, including Catholicism, centered at the Vatican.

Card introduces an interesting device—a talent developed by Ender to “speak” the truths of a person’s life, whether soon or a long time after death.

Scott notes in his introduction that

The concept of a “speaker for the dead” arose from my experiences with death and funerals...suffice it to say that I grew dissatisfied with the way that we use our funerals to revise the life of the dead, to give the dead a story so different from their actual life that, in effect...we erase them, we edit them, we make them into a person much easier to live with than the person who actually lived...[But] to understand who a person really was, what his or her life really meant, the speaker for the dead would have to explain their self-story—what they meant to do, what they actually did, what they regretted, what they rejoiced in. That’s the story that we never know, the story that we never can know—and yet, at the time of death, it’s the only story truly worth telling.

When we get to an actual “speaking,” it’s beautifully done—indeed, it’s a nod to an eschatological understanding of human life, which leaves us wondering how to better live our own lives.

Lastly, Card’s portrayal of a Catholic bishop surprised me. Whenever I come across a cleric in books or films, I brace for the worst—for the stereotypical villain or all-around unpleasant person. But Bishop Peregrino may surprise one or two readers who were expecting a less flattering ending.

An editor recommended *Speaker for the Dead* when he read my forthcoming novel, *A Printer’s Choice*—also a science fiction story that envisions a future with the Church very much alive and well. Growing up, most of the science fiction I read (and I read a lot) vanquished faith, Christianity in particular. Perhaps that’s one reason why I left the Church for two decades, only to return quite certain of Catholicism’s role now and until to the end of time.

*William L. Patenaude is an engineer with Rhode Island’s Department of Environmental Management and is a special lecturer in theology at Providence College.*

*Tracey Rowland:*

Roger Scruton, *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands: Thinkers of the New Left* (The title speaks for itself!)

David C. Schindler, *Freedom from Reality: The Diabolical Character of Modern Liberty* (This is a must-read for anyone interested in the pathologies of liberal ideology.)

Michael Walsh, *The Devil's Pleasure Palace: The Cult of Critical Theory and the Subversion of the West* (Important reading for those who are innocent about the influence of Critical Theory.)

Bruce S. Thornton, *The Fracturing of the EU* (Excellent political analysis from a non-EU apologist.)

Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Marion and Theology* (This is possibly *the* most user-friendly introduction to the thought of Jean-Luc Marion. One does not need to be steeped in the history and methodology of phenomenology to follow the author's exposition of the key concepts and argumentation in the works of this famous French Catholic philosopher.)

James V. Schall, *A Line Through the Human Heart: On Sinning and Being Forgiven* (For those who still believe it is possible to sin!)

Thomas Weinandy, *Jesus the Christ* (Great Christology 101 contribution)

Jose Granados et.al; *Accompanying, Discerning, Integrating: A Handbook for the Pastoral Care of the Family According to Amoris Laetitia* (For those who wish to interpret AL using an hermeneutic of continuity, that is, AL read within the entire ecclesial tradition without a repudiation of St. John Paul's moral theology.)

John Milbank and Adrian Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue: Post-Liberalism and the Human Future* (More on the crisis of liberalism—this one with an English accent.)

Alexander von Schönburg, *Welt-Geschichte to Go* (This is a *Der Spiegel* bestseller. It is written in easy-to-read German. The sentences are kept short. One doesn't have to read half a page before finding a verb. Anyone who has secondary-school-level German should be able to follow it. It's a very entertaining exposition of the great moments in world history as well as a debunking of some popular "urban myths." Chapter titles include "From Adam to Apple" and "From Hero to Zero." Perfect for travel reading or stimulating the imaginations of young scholars born after the so-called "end of history.")

Tracey Rowland holds the St. John Paul II chair of Theology at the University of Notre Dame (Australia).

Gerald J. Russello:

I had the chance to read for the first time the novel *Count Belisarius* by Robert Graves, published 80 years ago next year. It is a fictional account of the great Byzantine general of the title, who reconsidered much of the Western Roman Empire for the emperor Justinian (who sat in Constantinople) in the sixth century. For anyone interested in late antiquity and the slow separation of the Western Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox, the book is a real treat.

Orestes Brownson is an American Catholic author everyone should know; Lord Acton called him one of the most learned men he had ever met. Brownson, a convert, tried to meld Catholic revelation and insight with the American tradition of ordered liberty. Brownson contended that political order can only be obtained through acknowledgement of a personal God who loves us and whom we love in turn. Richard Reinsch has put together a new collection of his more important writings on politics and culture called *Seeking the Truth*.

As for more recent books, both Patrick Deneen's *Why Liberalism Failed* and James Matthew Wilson's *Vision of the Soul* diagnose our current cultural moment, pulling no punches but offering a way out, through renewed emphasis on community, beauty, and rejection of ideology.

Gerald J. Russello is editor of The University Bookman.

Russell Shaw:

A lot of my reading in 2017 focused on a particular project, which is to say it was of interest to me but possibly not to everybody else. (In case you wonder, the project was a series of profiles of popes from Pius IX to Francis, written for periodical publication and possibly serving as the core of a book.)

But be that as it may, there are two titles out of a larger number that I think I can reasonably recommend to people interested in learning more about the papacy in the last century-and-a-half.

The first of these is *The Papacy in the Age of Totalitarianism 1914-1958*, by Cambridge historian John Pollard (published by Oxford University Press as part of its Oxford History of the Christian Church series). The book is long and heavily written (and the proofreading—or lack thereof—absolutely atrocious), but it tells a fascinating story and is something that serious readers will be consulting for years to come.

Pollard is generally fair and balanced, but nobody is likely to agree with absolutely all of his judgments. That is true, for example, of what he says about Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust, where he concludes disapprovingly that Pius chose to play the diplomat rather than the prophet. Although this may be true, Pollard misses the point that, given the terrible circumstances in which he found himself in those terrible times, a reasonable person might reasonably conclude that “diplomat” was the morally responsible choice for Pope Pius to make.

A much better read, but unavoidably superficial, is Eamon Duffy's popular history of the papacy, *Saints and Sinners* (also from Oxford). Duffy, like Pollard a Cambridge historian, writes well and also is generally fair while leaning to the liberal side. For a quick overview of a very large subject covering two millennia in fewer than 500 pages, this volume manages to be not only engaging but informative.

Two other titles come to mind: *The End of the Modern World* by Romano Guardini (ISI Books) and *Faith in Luther* by Paul Hacker (Emmaus Academic).

The Guardini is a short, densely written meditation on the dawning of what (so far) is termed the “post-modern” era. The argument, simply put, is that post-modern man finds himself in the perilous situation of exercising more and more control over the world around him while having abandoned the underpinning of religiously grounded moral principle essential to making reliably good use of his awesome power. He calls for a renewal of faith that will undoubtedly be accompanied by the emergence of a smaller Church but also one more serious and more faithful to the message of the Gospel.

Hacker's volume, originally published in 1966 with a preface by Joseph Ratzinger (the future Pope Benedict XVI) and now republished on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the start of the Protestant Reformation, is a probing study of Luther's distinctive theology of faith as the origin of the “anthropocentric” version of Christianity now so common in religious circles. This is a healthy antidote to the naively uncritical assessments of Luther appearing in connection with the anniversary.

*Russell Shaw is the author of 20 books, including American Church: The Remarkable Rise, Meteoric Fall, and Uncertain Future of Catholicism in America.*

*Edward Short:*

Over the past year, I read the Oxford University Press reissue of Gilbert Highet's *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature* (1949). It was written shortly after the author returned to Columbia University having served in the British Army in Germany, where he helped recover the swag that Adolf and his chums had confiscated from their conquered lands. Since I was reading Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-88) at the same time, I was particularly struck by this passage:

Gibbon may be right in despising the wild ascetics of the Thebaid, the grass-eating anachorets, and the hysterical sectaries of Byzantium; but would he prefer the Tartars, the Turks, the Northmen, and the Huns? The history of nearly every Roman province shows how the successive waves of savages that broke over the walls of the empire were resisted by Christians, and even when they burst the dikes and flowed in, were, at last, through Christian teaching and example, calmed and controlled and civilized. Perhaps it was inevitable for Gibbon in the eighteenth century to believe that Christian fanaticism was one of the most dangerous of all evils and to despise Christianity for inspiring it. A more complete explanation is that, even if Christian creeds sometimes gave an outlet to the forces of savagery, Christianity was always exercised to repress them.... And to us in the twentieth century, who have seen the barbarities of highly organized contemporary pagan peoples and who are likely to see more, Christianity is very clearly a greater thing than Gibbon could understand, one of the greatest constructive social forces in human history.

It is comical to think of what would befall any Columbia professor if he dared to publish such sentiments today. (Public disembowelment, no doubt, on the steps of Butler Library.)

Other books I enjoyed include Jacques Philippe's marvelous guides to prayer (too numerous to name, though every one of them is a gem); Samuel Johnson's *Debates in Parliament* (1741-44), which Yale recently released in three volumes in its excellent edition of Johnson's collected works; Wilfrid Ward's *Ten Personal Studies* (1908), which includes fascinating pen portraits of Arthur Balfour, Henry Sidgwick, Pope Leo XIII, Cardinal Wiseman, Cardinal Newman, and Cardinal Manning; David Kynaston's magisterial history of the Bank of England, *Till Time's Last Sand*, which provides brilliant insights into the volatile financial world in which the fathers of Newman and Manning (ruined bankers both) conducted their affairs; and the third volume of David Knowles' masterly *The Religious Orders in England* (1959), which nicely anatomizes the visitations of Tudor England's monasteries before their dissolution.

Lastly, I reread St. Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, which, after the birth of my son, Edward John Joseph Sebastian, in October, I found particularly useful, especially the passage where the great saint sets himself to ponder with "great affection how much God Our Lord has done for me; and how much He has given me of what He has; and further, how according to his Divine plan, it is the Lord's wish...to give me Himself." Ignatius then reflects on what he ought to give the Divine Majesty in return and concludes with this, which no father of a newborn son can read dispassionately:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. You gave it all to me; to you Lord I give it back. All is yours, dispose of it entirely according to your will. Give me the grace to love you, for that is enough for me.

*Edward Short is the author, most recently, of Newman and History (Gracewing).*

*R.J. Stove:*

This was a year when, because I was completing a musicology degree at Monash University in Melbourne, I needed to ration very strictly all reading for pleasure (I likewise rationed listening for pleasure, movie-going for pleasure, and so forth). For this degree, I somehow managed to obtain a High Distinction, an achievement calling irresistibly to my mind William F. Buckley's celebrated 1965 promise that if elected New York City's mayor, his first act in office would be to demand a recount.

If one is permitted to name not just one's most pleasurable 2017 reading but also one's least pleasurable 2017 reading, I can identify without the slightest hesitation the recipient of my Razzies award: Thomas L. Friedman's *Thank You for Being Late* (2016). Friedman takes 486 pages to prove—in his own person—that it is perfectly possible to have spent years filing dispatches on Middle East carnage for Manhattan's most internationally celebrated newspaper while retaining a world-view so inane in its naïve optimism that it would have disgraced the dopier Swedish Boy Scouts of circa 1938.

On to more pleasant literary topics than the Big Apple. Not having read anything of A.J. Liebling's except his (still extremely amusing and clever) New Yorker profiles of Earl Long, I approached his collection of wartime reportage—*The Road Back to Paris*, originally released late in 1944—with a general predisposition to respect but with no strong feelings pro or contra. I can only wish that I had discovered Liebling the foreign correspondent earlier in my life. Liebling possessed that rarest of reportorial attributes: the ability to keep his eyes and ears open. Have you ever wondered, for instance, how France's underground press managed to keep going at all during the Occupation? Where did it acquire its paper stock and its Gestetner machines? Leave it to Liebling to act as sleuth on such issues.

Who recalls the Czech-born, British-domiciled Ernest Gellner now? Since his death in 1995, aged 69, he seems to have been airbrushed from intellectual history. Yet his 1983 treatise *Nations and Nationalism* is if anything more relevant in the age of Trump and Brexit than it was when it first appeared. As an epigrammatist Gellner warranted comparison with Pascal; "It is nationalism that engenders nations, and not the other way around," is a typical example.

To conclude: bless me, readers, for I have sinned. Fellow admirers of David Lodge's novel *Changing Places* will recall the professor of English literature who astonishes and horrifies his colleagues by his revelation that he has never...actually...read...Hamlet. It is to my everlasting shame that before 2017 I had never actually read Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* from cover to cover; I had read only the same purple passages that any other literate right-wing Catholic has internalized.

Well, clearly this culpable ignorance on my part could not licitly continue, and so finally I did read every sentence of the *Reflections*. In which activity I became a recognized public nuisance, since I kept wanting to pester friends and, indeed, strangers with one dazzling insight after another from the book in front of my nose: "Listen to this!" "Hey, did you know that Burke said the following?" Und so weiter. But I cannot finish this overview without citing one particularly derisive remark of Burke's, as horribly applicable to 99 percent of post-Christian journalism as to the invertebrate liberal revolutionists (not yet, in 1790, Jacobins) whose unctuous utopian verbiage Burke so detested:

I confess myself unable to find out anything which displays, in a single instance, the work of a comprehensive and disposing mind, or even the provisions of a vulgar prudence.

*R.J. Stove is an organist, an adult convert to Catholicism, and the author César Franck: His Life and Times.*

*Dr. Patrick Toner:*

I've been studying distributism. The list reflects that. The best books I read *for the first time* in 2017:

*The Sun of Justice* by Harold Robbins heads the list. In this “essay on the social teaching of the Catholic Church,” Robbins does a masterful job of presenting the essentials of distributism. I think I can safely say that if you want to get a decent grip on distributism, this book and Belloc’s *Essay on the Restoration of Property* are the best places to start. (Honorable mention to Robbins’s “distributist biography” of Chesterton, *The Last of the Realists*.)

Related in some very interesting and important ways to distributism is Harry Braverman’s *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. It’s a page-turner. I am not joking. Braverman gives a thoroughgoing Marxist analysis of work. I got this book from my library, read it, and immediately ordered my own copy. I will read it again soon. The distributists like Robbins, Eric Gill, E.F. Schumacher, and Belloc and company often say penetrating things about work. Braverman, however, gives a compelling and detailed analysis of how we got here. It’s pretty devastating. (I was pointed to this book by Matthew Crawford’s fine *Shop Class As Soulcraft*, another excellent book I read for the first time in 2017, and another honorable mention.)

Karl Polanyi’s *The Great Transformation* is not nearly as delightful a read as Braverman’s book. (No, really, I’m not kidding: that thing is a *page-turner*. You still don’t believe me.) Polanyi’s writing is repetitive, and he is oftentimes remarkably unclear, largely through taking way too much for granted. But despite its literary weaknesses, the book interestingly traces the rise of the “market society” through a pretty detailed study of the Industrial Revolution in England. I surely don’t know enough about these matters to give a mature judgment on his thesis, but I found the book bracing nonetheless. (Honorable mention to George O’Brien’s *An Essay on the Economic Effects of the Reformation*, a polemically-charged study of the rise of capitalism out of Protestantism.)

My study of distributism has a highly practical side: I’ve recently become a small-scale farmer, and I’ve been reading tons of great farming books. *Tree Crops* by J. Russell Smith stands out. It’s a fun, well-written book that gives plenty of practical advice on, well, tree crops. The principal interest is in producing livestock feed: acorns, mulberries, persimmons, hickories, walnuts, and so on. Many areas that can’t reasonably be plowed under for row crops can be planted to trees, and animals can be allowed to self-harvest the bounty. It’s a pretty great idea. (Honorable mention to Newman Turner’s *Fertility Pastures*.)

If you pushed me, I could probably come up with an argument to show that my fiction choices relate somehow to distributism. But nobody’s pushed me yet. So: *Watership Down*. Yes, I read this for the first time in 2017. I read it aloud to the kids. They liked it way more than our previous read-aloud, *The Pickwick Papers*. That makes me a little sad. But still. ( *Go Set a Watchman* gets an honorable mention here. It’s not a great book, but it’s pretty good and it’s an interesting companion for *To Kill a Mockingbird*.)

Finally, a straight-up philosophy book. Father George Speltz’s *The Importance of Rural Life According to the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* shows that all this small farm, locavore business isn’t just some newfangled hipster silliness. It’s pretty likely I read this book before 2017, but I don’t remember for sure, so I’m helping myself to it. (Honorable mention to Roger Scruton’s *How to Think Seriously About the Planet*.)

*Dr. Patrick Toner is associate professor of philosophy at Wake Forest University.*

*K.V. Turley:*

Laura Cumming’s recently published *The Vanishing Man: In Pursuit of Velazquez* was a surprising read. It offers art criticism that is not only beautifully written but is also a dual biography of the artist and his audience, the art lover and the object of his fascination. Central to the text is a lost portrait of King Charles I, and the story of two men: the painter Velazquez, and the provincial bookseller John Snare, who stumbled upon the lost portrait—or did he? Part mystery story, part social history, *The Vanishing Man* is a great read. It is also an all-too-human tale of obsession and its consequences.

Talking of obsession, the next book has echoes of a similar creative fixation. In the 1980s Kevin Brownlow wrote *Napoleon, Abel Gance’s Classic Film*. From his days as a schoolboy the late 1940s, however, Brownlow was obsessed and engrossed by a search for the complete version of the Abel Gance’s silent masterpiece *Napoleon*. Eventually, the 1927 film would be lovingly restored by Brownlow. The release last year of yet another version of this restoration shows that this work continues. *Napoleon, Abel Gance’s Classic Film* is a history about the making of Gance’s cinematic monument. It is also one man’s memoir about encountering something that changed his life in ways he could not have foreseen. For a few pennies he bought two bulky film canisters containing an incomplete version of a film he had never heard of; now he is forever linked with this film.

Unlike Gance’s *Napoleon*, there has been no noticeable resurgence of interest in the writings of Charles Lamb. His collected essays, *The Essays of Elia*, are largely forgotten. At the end of the 19th century, however, his essays were celebrated, admired, and much quoted. Reading them today it is easy to see why they have fallen from fashion. Nevertheless, there are some gems that still resonate with humour and charm, insight and beauty. If nothing else Lamb is a witty and urbane observer of humanity. This is by no means all, though. There is a deeper, perhaps darker, current running through much of his work. Throughout *The Essays of Elia*, there is an air of melancholy, a sadness born out of an awareness of the transience of life, and more than a hint of bitter regret. This is always underpinned by an implicit acknowledgement of the fragility of one’s grasp upon what passes for reality.

It pays to rummage in second-hand bookstores. On a recent trip to Belfast I did just that. For the princely sum of £2 I carried back to

London a collection of essays by a son of that city, Robert Lynd. *Galway of the Races: Selected Essays* is a superb anthology by an exceptional talent. Whether on the subject of literature and the arts, war and politics, life on a grand scale or in a minor key, Lynd's words are as finely honed as his observations are perceptive. His portrait of H.F. Kettle is an excellent example of his craft.

A book that still haunts long after the final page is turned is *Dispatches* by Michael Herr. Is there a more visceral account of war—in this case the conflict in Vietnam? As disturbing as it is poetic, as clear-sighted as it is emphatic, it is not for the faint-hearted; nor is it for the young or easily offended, such is its language and content. But, for all that, it is a testament to the compulsive madness of war then, and its warnings are still, no doubt, sadly relevant today.

*K.V. Turley writes from London.*



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**Robert**

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Thanks for this! I look forward to your best books post each year.

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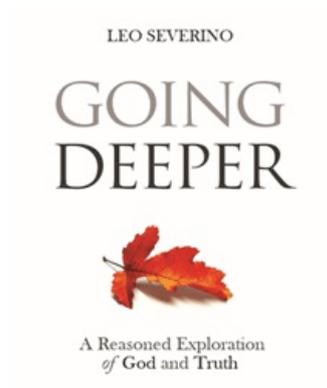
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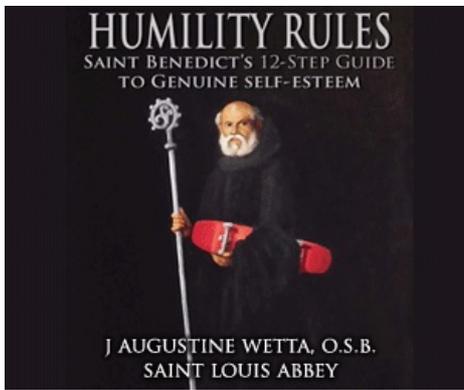
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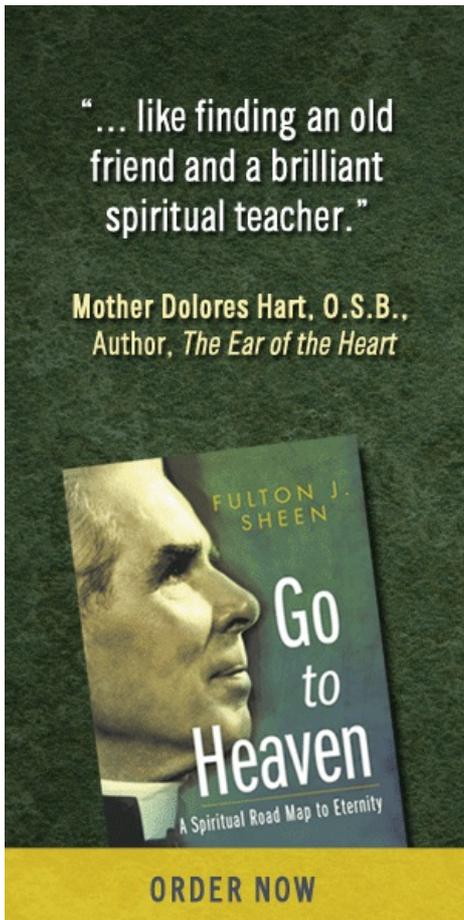
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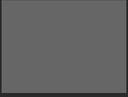
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