

Book Discussion Group Book List

Many of these book titles can be found in our Adult Library in the Bridal Parlor. Our Adult Library is a good-will lending library, so please return and re-shelve the books you borrow when you are done with them. Suggested borrow time is 2-3 weeks. Enjoy!

1. A Rabbi Talks with Jesus by Jacob Neusner

Imagine yourself transported two thousand years back in time to Galilee at the moment of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. After hearing it, would you abandon your religious beliefs and ideology to follow him, or would you hold on to your own beliefs and walk away? In "A Rabbi Talks with Jesus", Jacob Neusner considers just such a spiritual journey. Placing himself within the context of the Gospel of Matthew, Neusner imagines himself in a dialogue with Jesus of Nazareth and pays him the supreme Judaic gesture of respect: making a connection with him through an honest debate about the nature of God's One Truth. Neusner explains why the Sermon on the Mount would not have convinced him to follow Jesus and why, by the criterion of the Torah of Moses, he would have continued to follow the teachings of Moses. He explores the reasons Christians believe in Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven, while Jews continue to believe in the Torah of Moses and a kingdom of priests and holy people on earth. This revised and expanded edition, with a foreword by Donald Akenson, creates a thoughtful and accessible context for discussion of the most fundamental question of why Christians and Jews believe what they believe.

2. Between Noon and Three: Romance, Law, and the Outrage of Grace by Robert Farrar Capon

With wit, humor and exegesis, Capon evokes a bit of C.S. Lewis as he brushes past centuries of dry theologizing on concepts of grace and freedom, law and sin, and actually makes the questions fun. Describing his method as "theology by way of entertainment," he illustrates the radical nature of grace with a "parable" about an illicit affair between a promiscuous English professor and a graduate student, both married. Capon, an Episcopal priest, is determined to "separate the liquor of grace from the mash of mortality," and some may accuse him of excessive haste in setting aside the latter. His justification: "No mistake can hold a candle to the love that draws us home." Chiding the "grace-fearing spoilsport in every one of us," Capon argues that organized religion too often encourages us "to act more like subjects of a police state than fellow citizens of the saints."

3. Conclave: The Politics, Personalities, and Process of the Next Papal Election by John L. Allen, Jr.

Timely, informative, and engaging, this volume offers a popular and understandable review of the details involved in a papal election. Written by Vatican correspondent Allen (Cardinal Ratzinger: The Vatican's Enforcer of the Faith), the book is free of ecclesiastical jargon, save for some essential concepts, which are adequately addressed in the glossary. Allen begins with a 30-page job description for the next pope, then addresses several key issues that remain unresolved for John Paul II and will likely weigh heavily on the minds of the electing cardinals. The issues include collegiality, ecumenism, globalization, bioethics, and women's role in the Church. The dynamics of the conclave are discussed step by step, from the announcement of a papal illness through the first days of the new pope's reign. Political parties or camps among the cardinal electors are amply presented. Lastly, 20 leading front-running cardinals are named and profiled, while those in the "rest of the field" are each given a brief paragraph of introduction. Allen is scheduled to be an expert analyst for the Fox News network during the next conclave.

4. Early Christian Worship: A Basic Introduction to Ideas and Practice by Paul Bradshaw

Early Christian Worship provides a straightforward readable introduction to worship in the first four centuries of the church's existence. It describes what Christians actually did but also explains why they acted as they did. Why did they choose some patterns instead of others? How did they see and understand their own worship? What effect did all this have on developing Christian ideas and what effect did the ideas in turn have on the worship. Distinguished liturgical scholar Paul Bradshaw makes the latest research accessible to a wide audience. Anyone who want to know more about the foundations of their own worship will enjoy this book.

5. Faithful Listening: Discernment in Everyday Life by Joan Mueller

Mueller remedies the difficulty of discernment with a textured overview of this practical charism of the Spirit: how, when, where, and why to discern, examining models of good discernment from scripture and history with particular attention to Ignatian rules for discerning.

6. Five Great Catholic Ideas by Edward Wm. Clark

At first glance, this may appear to be a mere summary of trendy Catholic theology. The author, president and rector of St. John's Seminary College, Camarillo, Calif., discusses these five ideas: We are saved in community; the kingdom of heaven begins on earth; God respects our human freedom; scriptural interpretation is a work of the whole church; great ideas develop over time. On second glance, however, the reader sees, for example, that the author means by "community" something much deeper than liturgical chumminess, and by "human freedom" he means far more than "do whatever you feel like doing." It is in the church that one finds salvation, he says, and in order to make fully human decisions we need clarity of understanding and freedom of will. Five Great Catholic Ideas takes the Catholic basics and unpacks them in a way that will inform and inspire. To read this book is to discover that there is a depth and complexity to these ideas that should short-circuit facile distinctions between "liberal" and "conservative" interpretations.

7. Pedophiles and Priests: Anatomy of a Contemporary Crisis by Philip Jenkins

Since 1982, 400 Catholic clergy (out of a total of 50,000 American priests) have been accused of sexual misconduct with minors. In this in-depth study, Jenkins, professor of history and religious studies at Pennsylvania State University, examines the circumstances surrounding the molestation charges that peaked in the early 1990s. He looks at such prominent cases as those of Father Bruce Ritter, founder of Covenant House, who was forced to resign in disgrace in 1990; and the notorious Rev. James Porter, who may have molested more than 100 children before he was convicted and sentenced to prison. Jenkins probes scandals in other religions; looks at the traditional "anti-Catholic" feelings in the U.S.; documents the media's frenzied reactions to the charges; chronicles the feminist response to the allegations; and researches the financial drain on the Church caused by litigation (estimated to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars) as well as the debate surrounding recovered memory and repressed memory. Jenkins (Intimate Enemies) has written a thorough, academic study that convincingly challenges the popular estimate of the extent of pedophiles in the Church.

8. Six Ways to Pray from Six Great Saints by Gloria Hutchinson

Hutchinson shows us how to go to the experts to improve our prayer lives or just sample a different style.

9. The Catholic Church in the Land of the Holy Cross: A History of the Diocese of Portland, Maine by Faculty at the College of the Holy Cross

A history of the Diocese of Portland, Maine. Researched and written by a faculty of the College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Massachusetts. Beautiful pictures of the Catholic churches in Maine, as well as their history.

10. The Da Vinci Hoax: Exposing the Errors in the Da Vinci Code by Olson & Miesel

The Da Vinci Code, Dan Brown's best selling novel, purports to be more than fiction: it claims to be based on fact and scholarly research. Brown wants his readers to believe that he is revealing the long-concealed truth about Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and early Christianity, a truth that he says has been suppressed by the malevolent and conspiratorial forces of the Catholic Church. The novel alleges that there has been throughout history a secret group of true followers of a Gnostic Jesus and his wife, Mary Magdalene, the true "Holy Grail". Almost everything most Christians and non-Christians think they know about Jesus, according to Dan Brown, is completely wrong, the result of Catholic propaganda designed to hide the truth from the world. But are The Da Vinci Code's claims fact or just plain fiction? Is the novel well-researched as claimed? What is the truth about Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and the early Church? Has the Catholic Church distorted the real Jesus? Why is the novel so popular? What about the anti-Catholic, anti-Christian agenda behind the novel? Best selling author Carl Olson and journalist Sandra Miesel answer these and other important questions. Their painstaking research into The Da Vinci Code and its sources reveals some surprising truths. No one who has read or heard about The Da Vinci Code should miss this provocative and illuminating new book.

11. The Great Divorce by C.S. Lewis

The Great Divorce is C.S. Lewis's Divine Comedy: the narrator bears strong resemblance to Lewis (by way of Dante); his Virgil is the fantasy writer George MacDonald; and upon boarding a bus in a nondescript neighborhood, the narrator is taken to Heaven and Hell. The book's primary message is presented with almost oblique tidiness--"There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.'" However, the narrator's descriptions of sin and temptation will hit quite close to home for many readers. Lewis has a genius for describing the intricacies of vanity and self-deception, and this book is tremendously persistent in forcing its reader to consider the ultimate consequences of everyday pettiness.

The Jesus I Never Knew by Philip Yancey

An old adage says, "God created man in His own image and man has been returning the favor ever since." Philip Yancey realized that despite a lifetime attending Sunday school topped off by a Bible college education, he really had no idea who Jesus was. In fact, he found himself further and further removed from the person of Jesus, distracted instead by flannel-graph figures and intellectual inspection. He determined to use his journalistic talents to approach Jesus, in the context of time, within the framework of history. In *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Yancey explores the life of Jesus, as he explains, "'from below,' to grasp as best I can what it must have been like to observe in person the extraordinary events unfolding in Galilee and Judea" as Jesus traveled and taught. Yancey examines three fundamental questions: who Jesus was, why he came, and what he left behind. Step by step, scene by scene, Yancey probes the culture into which Jesus was born and grew to adulthood; his character and mission; his teachings and miracles; his legacy--not just as history has told it, but as he himself intended it to be. Yancey is not alone in his examination of the "real" Jesus. Publishing today is replete with writers committed to setting the story "straight," joining countless others who, over the past 2,000 years, have determined to discover the truth about Jesus. But where others would deconstruct and discount, Yancey disarms and discloses. We become colleagues with him as he examines the accounts of the life of Jesus. And among the things that we discover is that Jesus himself leaves us few options: either he was who he said he was or he was nuts. Philip Yancey was awarded the Gold Medallion Christian Book of the Year award for this book in 1996 by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. It's not the first, nor the last, award Yancey has won for his writing. But the writing is not necessarily the great gift of this book. Yancey allows the reader to discover, along with him, *The Jesus I Never Knew*.

12. The Reluctant Saint: The Life of Francis of Assisi by Donald Spoto

It does not seem possible that the world needs another biography of St. Francis of Assisi, but Spoto (*The Hidden Jesus*) makes a credible case for adding to the glut of books and articles about the medieval saint. (Spoto cites one count taken nearly 40 years ago that puts the number at 1,575.) He argues that new discoveries in several fields and the latest Franciscan scholarship justify this new biography. Although the findings of his research required Spoto to strip away some of the romance surrounding Francis's familiar story, he manages to report them without detracting from the integrity of the saint. He raises, for example, questions about whether Francis actually bore the stigmata, or wounds of the crucified Christ, pointing out that sources interviewed for Francis's canonization denied that he had the marks. Spoto suggests that Francis may actually have suffered from leprosy and that his companions interpreted those wounds as a sharing in Christ's suffering. Spoto's chronological recounting of Francis's life is sufficiently engaging to retain the interest even of those familiar with the basic facts of the saint's story. Occasionally however, he lapses into seemingly misplaced preaching pedagogy, such as when he holds forth on the subject of conversion in a section about Francis's spiritual transformation- but given the saint's diverse appeal, this book should interest a wide audience.

13. The Shattered Lantern: Rediscovering a Felt Presence of God by Ronald Rolheiser

The Shattered Lantern, prequel to *The Holy Longing*, has quickly become one of Crossroad's best-selling titles. In this pivotal work, Ronald Rolheiser shines new light on the contemplative path of Western Christianity and offers a dynamic way forward. Now with short reflection guide.

14. Tuesdays with Morrie: An Old Man, A Young Man, and Life's Greatest

Lesson by Mitch Albom

This true story about the love between a spiritual mentor and his pupil has soared to the bestseller list for many reasons. For starters: it reminds us of the affection and gratitude that many of us still feel for the significant mentors of our past. It also plays out a fantasy many of us have entertained: what would it be like to look those people up again, tell them how much they meant to us, maybe even resume the mentorship? Plus, we meet Morrie Schwartz--a one of a kind professor, whom the author describes as looking like a cross between a biblical prophet and Christmas elf. And finally we are privy to intimate moments of Morrie's final days as he lies dying from a terminal illness. Even on his deathbed, this twinkling-eyed mensch manages to teach us all about living robustly and fully.

15. What is the Point of Being Christian? by Timothy Radcliffe

A Christian is pointed towards God, who is the point of everything. If one thinks of religion as just 'useful' then one has reduced it to another consumer product. But if we are pointed to God, this should make a difference to how we live. Christians are usually no better than anyone else, but their lives should be marked by distinctive forms of hope, happiness and courage. Shot through with humour, friendship and wisdom, the pages of this book outline a manner of living which is at once faithful to the teachings of Jesus and rooted in the tradition of the Church and at the same time responsive to the turbulence of the modern world.