



THE BOOK THAT . . .¹

1. THE BOOK I AM CURRENTLY READING.

John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides. After my father died, I committed to read Paton's autobiography, since Dad had so extolled him for his sufferings for Christ. Paton wrote not to become a *cause célèbre*, but "to show that the Finger of God is as visible still, to those who have eyes to see, as when the fire-cloud Pillar led His People through the wilderness." His intent is traceable through the action.

2. THE BOOK THAT CHANGED MY LIFE.

We were so blessed in our formative years by The Banner of Truth's student offers. We built our libraries, skimmed on our exam revision, and walked many a domestic and foreign beach reading the likes of Watson, Bonar, M'Cheyne, and Pink. But when in the early 1990s Principal Boyd at the Free Church College (now Edinburgh Theological Seminary) allotted to me the task of summarizing Herman Ridderbos' chapter on adoption in *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (transl. by John R. de Witt [SPCK, 1977]), I became so fascinated by the doctrine as to set out to contribute to its recovery. This calling I continue to pursue.

3. THE BOOK I WISH I COULD HAVE WRITTEN.

If I may distinguish a book from the attending affliction and persecution which shaped its tone and content (after all, we don't seek persecution!), then I wish I could have written the *Letters of Samuel Rutherford*. To ooze Christ under such pressure, without affectation and with such descriptive flair can only be God's remarkable gift of grace and a consolation of his love!

¹ The following was submitted in February 2018 to the Banner of Truth's blog series "The Book That . . ." at the request of Rev. Geoff Thomas

4. THE BOOK THAT HELPED ME IN MY PREACHING.

I have long cherished *Preaching: The Preacher and Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (ed. Samuel T. Logan Jr, [Evangelical Press, 1986]). It has breadth, depth, readability, and with multiple contributors lacks some of the personal, now dated (albeit amusing) idiosyncrasies of the single-author volumes of Spurgeon, Lloyd-Jones, *et al.* Such preachers, being one-of-a-kind, don't tend to write the best books on preaching.

5. THE BOOK I THINK IS MOST UNDERRATED.

Um, "the book"? Actually, I am torn between the Hendrickson series of *Ante-Nicene* and *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (the shoulders upon which the reformers stood), and The Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Confession of Faith (1823). Nineteenth-century historian Philip Schaff described it as "far inferior to [the Westminster Confession of Faith] in ability and accuracy." Yet, it has greater emphasis on the Holy Spirit (Arts 20 and 21), it distinguishes effectual calling and regeneration (cf., WCF 10 with CMC 22 and 26), and inserts articles on union with Christ and peace of conscience (Arts 23 and 32). With further investigation, I wonder to what degree Schaff's opinion would hold up.

6. THE BOOK THAT MADE ME SAY MANY "AMENS" AS I TURNED ITS PAGES.

In church life, some emphasize strategizing at the expense of revival (human responsibility over divine sovereignty), others revival at the expense of strategizing (divine sovereignty over human responsibility). C. John ("Jack") Miller's *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church* offers, it seems to me, a compelling counterbalance, rooting the "how-tos" of church reform and community impact in a fresh congregation-wide believing and

(<https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2018/the-book-that-11/>, accessed June 5, 2020).



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penitent appropriation of the gifts of Christ and the Spirit. Ministers, as “chief repenters,” set the tone.

7. THE LAST BOOK THAT MADE ME WEEP.

In lament, A. N. Wilson’s *God’s Funeral* or Ludovic Kennedy’s *Farewell to God*, but I believe it was the *Qur’an*. Is there another volume so spiritually dark and physically threatening, yet so influential? The elements of truth it offers with the one hand (e.g., monotheism, respect for Jesus, sin, faith, righteousness, heaven and hell), it takes away with the other (Trinitarianism, a true understanding of predestination, the divinity of Christ and his work, a right understanding of faith and righteous deeds, etc.). Not all should read the *Qur’an*—its forewarning is ironic, “When thou dost read the *Qur’an* seek God’s protection from Satan the Rejected One” (*Sūrah An Nahl* [16:98])—but we each can beseech the LORD to continue his phenomenal work of saving Muslims from the darkness, and our lands from *Jihad*.

8. THE BOOK I REGRET NOT YET HAVING READ.

In detail, Augustine’s *City of God*. The evidence of the present suggests it is a timely book to read. I have observed in reading that God is sovereign over the “when” as well as the “what.”

9. THE BOOK I MOST OFTEN GAVE TO NEW CHURCH MEMBERS AND YOUNG CHRISTIANS.

At Seventh Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, we typically gave out the ESV Reformation Study Bible to those entering membership by profession of faith. Its wealth of resources (topical articles, creeds, confessions, and catechisms) and reliable study notes made this an ideal gift. For the entrance of established Christians, there is much to be said for Thom S. Rainer’s short and to-the-point *I AM A CHURCH MEMBER: Discovering the Attitude that Makes a Difference*.

10. THE BOOK I GIVE TO PEOPLE THINKING OF BECOMING CHRISTIANS.

Although I have found friends, when reading John Blanchard’s *Ultimate Questions*, to stumble over the “how” of creation (Paul, in his outreach, focused more on the “that” [Acts 17:25-28]), there is yet much to be said for this booklet which God has used phenomenally. Those serious about becoming Christians get beyond the section on creation.

11. THE BOOK I WISH I WERE ABLE TO WRITE AND WANT SOMEONE TO WRITE.

I was due to say, a volume on *Welsh Theology*, comparable in scope to the respective volumes of *Scottish Theology* by John Macleod and Thomas Torrance, but then I came across William Evans’ *An Outline of the History of Welsh Theology* (1900). Very much needed is a comprehensive, in-depth, Reformed study of biblical language (the diversity of Scripture’s inspired figures of speech, their varied functions in conveying God’s truth, and how they contribute to the unity of the Bible’s system of theology).

12. THE BOOK I WOULD LOVE TO SEE REPRINTED.

Willi Twisselmann’s *Die Gotteskindschaft der Christen nach dem Neuen Testament* (1939), but it requires translating into English as *The Divine Sonship of Christians according to the New Testament*. Little is known of Twisselmann, but his method treats sensitively the filial theme of Scripture, distinguishing treatments in non-Christian religions from the Old Testament; the Synoptic Gospels; Paul; Hebrews, James, and 1 Peter; and John, respectively, concluding with a comparison, connection, and assessment. Since Twisselmann’s family cannot be located to give permission for a translation, I would settle, for like reasons, for the reprinting of Witold Marchel’s *Abba, Vater! Die Vaterbotschaft des Neuen Testaments* (1963). It would also need translation. In English the title reads, *The New Testament’s Message of the Father*. I don’t vouch for every detail of these studies, but do welcome their methods, themes, and accessibility.



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13. THE BEST BOOK FOR CHILDREN.

Not having children, nor teaching junior Sunday School, and having lived across the Atlantic from nephews and nieces, this is not a genre I know well. The dialogue from the film *Shadowlands* comes to mind: "What can Jack [C. S. Lewis] know about children?" To which Lewis replies, "Warnie was a child, and, strange as it may seem, so was I!" So, my mind goes back to Marian Schoolland's *Leading Little Ones to God* and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Our Dad, as an ex-actor, brought the reading of *Pilgrim's Progress* to life, but children's editions seem now to abound. It's just as well that Bunyan's riches lay in heaven, for who could calculate the royalties he's owed?!

Thanks for the stimulation and the reminder of how blessed we are with the heritage of literature in the church's possession.

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