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Harding School of Theology

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Footnotes:Summer Reading 2019

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Footnotes¹

Curated Resources for Ministers



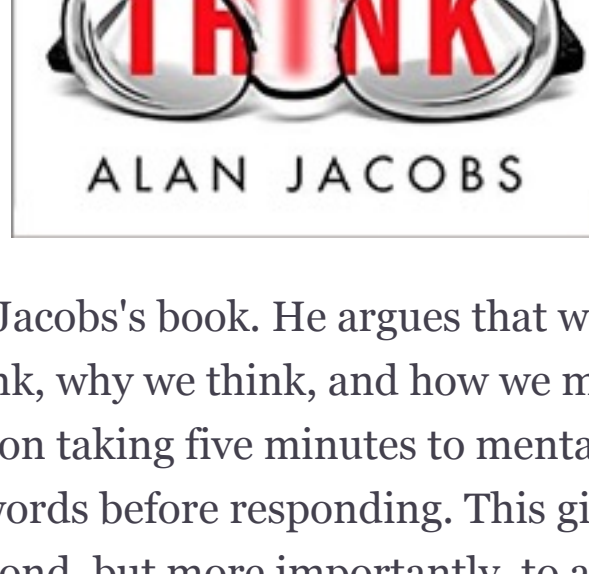
Hey Friends,
Today I'll send along a few brief reviews of things I've read in recent weeks. I know that summer is a time when many of you like to catch up on reading. Maybe you'll find something of interest.

I'll take a few weeks off after this issue. I'm excited about some of the topics we'll cover this fall. As always, we'll have a good mix of guests and contributors. I'll also get a few more Footnotes Audio episodes out.

Thanks for reading *Footnotes*.

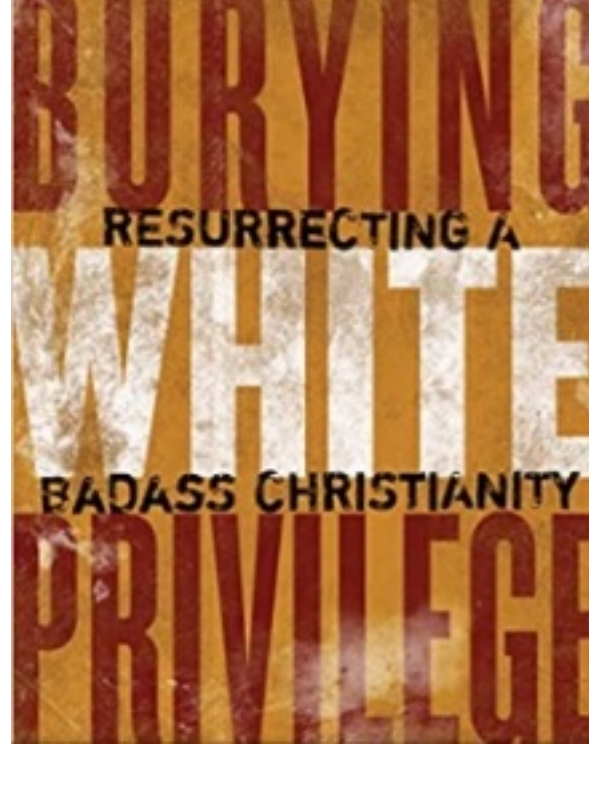


Summer Book Picks



I absolutely loved Alan Jacobs's book. He argues that we don't give much attention to how we think, why we think, and how we might have our minds changed. I loved his tip on taking five minutes to mentally summarize and review someone else's words before responding. This gives time not only to think about how to respond, but more importantly, to actually think.

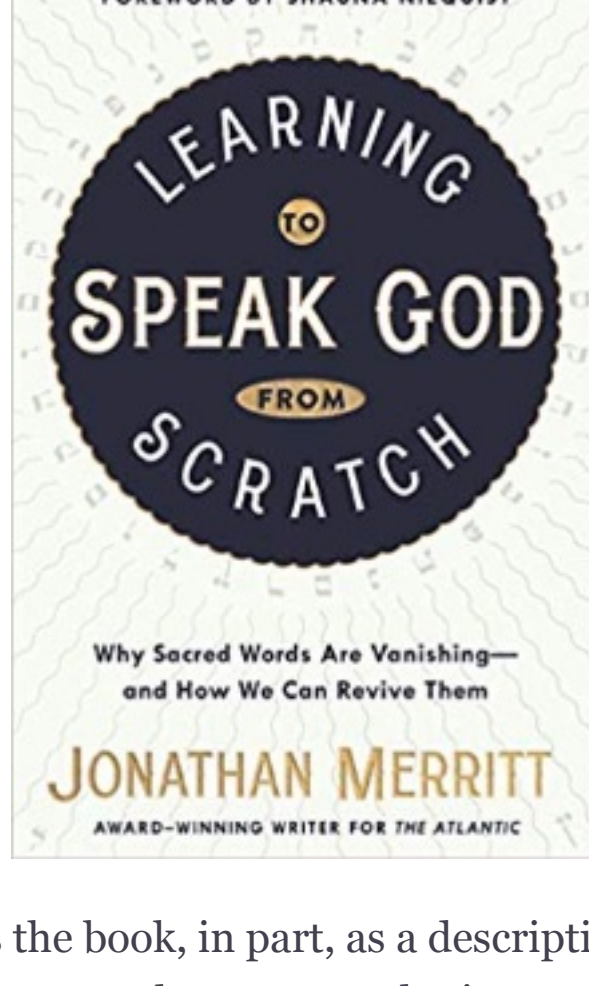
Not to sound like the old guys in the balcony on the Muppets, but this is a strong case for the printed book. With books, there is not the same immediate impulse to respond that is available on platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Plus, books are longer than articles, TV clips, and other formats. There isn't the same urge to erupt on someone for 1-2 sentences they wrote in the middle of their 200 page book.



De La Torre makes the case that American/European exceptionalism has created a Christianity that looks nothing like Christ. He takes particular aim at the brand of Evangelicalism that has taken its influence to the ballot box to elect Donald Trump (Ta-Nehisi Coates refers to Trump [as our first white president](#)).

One difference between the work of De La Torre and Coates, Michelle Alexander, and Robin DiAngelo is that they speak more to the issues of colorblindness. De La Torre insists that whiteness is not simply a matter of skin pigment, but participation in power structures that disproportionately hurt the oppressed. He says that not all light-colored people benefit from this privilege, and that some people of color benefit from their participation in the structures of white privilege. At some points, it sounds like he is claiming that class, and not race, is the true measure of power. This is an argument that many conservatives (like Thomas Sowell) would affirm, even though De La Torre is not a conservative.

I wonder how much his place as a Latinx scholar plays into this. Discrimination against Latinx communities has largely been linguistic and nationalistic, but not necessarily pigment-based. I think African-American scholars would locate the disparity more in color because the discrimination they have faced was [not about class, but about color](#).



Jonathan Merritt writes the book, in part, as a description of some transitions: moving from the American South to New York City; moving from conservative Evangelicalism to something quite different, and moving from being the son of [a visible leader in the Southern Baptist Convention](#) to having [his own voice and brand](#).

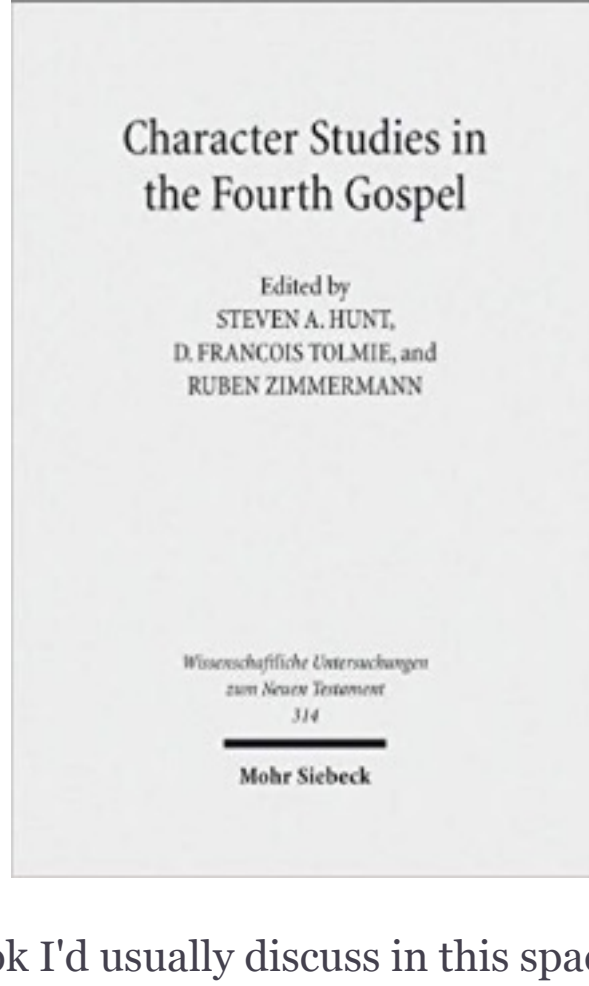
The book explores how we might revive words that have characterized historic Christianity, but understand them in a different way this time around. I found that to be a refreshing message, particularly considering how many of these words have suffered decline in our language (enter any of them in [Google Ngram](#) for evidence). The book amounts to one-part lexicon and one-part memoir. Merritt is an incredibly gifted writer.

I think a coming-of-age story is an odd place for the phrase "from scratch." Merritt speaks a lot about his background in church and how he was the churchiest kid around. He unpacks a lot of baggage in the book's pages. I appreciated the way that he tries to find a fresh faith, considering the materials he was given in childhood. He was making a goulash out of leftovers, not making something from scratch. That is not a huge quibble, however.

My only other question is a minor note in his book, but one that deserves larger consideration. I think we are way too generous in the way we talk about creeds and the politics that went into their creation. In his defense of creeds, Merritt writes, "The creeds express who God is, what God is like, and how God saves. They largely avoid theological pet peeves at issue today, which have given rise to heresy hunting." He then lists topics that are missing from creeds (role of women, nature of sexual expression, existence of hell, how to read the Bible, and how we should vote). He argues that our anti-credal culture has led to heresy hunting (like John Piper vs. Rob Bell).

The Nicene Creed is one of the most significant creeds of the Christian faith. Merritt is correct that it doesn't concern itself with issues like sex, gender, or voting (though I doubt many women got invitations to Nicea, so that kinda says where they were on the gender topic). The Nicene Creed (AD 325) condemns those who do not accept it (Arians). It was literally composed for the purpose of heresy hunting. In its historical context, this meant labeling Arius and his followers as heretics--they are specifically called *anathema* (meaning "a ban" or "excommunication"). We can feel however we wish about creeds and their significance, but this particular episode makes two megachurch pastors taking shots at one another on Twitter seem pretty tame.

But those two issues are small details that shouldn't stop you from reading the book.



This isn't the sort of book I'd usually discuss in this space, but it opens up some important conversations about where we are with scholarly publishing. The book includes seventy studies of the many characters in John's Gospel, with many of the essays published by leading scholars (Harold Attridge, J. Ramsey Michaels, Gail O'Day, and Marianne Meye Thompson). The final product is a really nice book where great scholars write on significant (and lesser-known) characters of the Bible. I can imagine this being a fantastic volume for the preacher who wants to go through John and focus on the characters. There is only one problem. The volume's publisher (Mohr Siebeck) prices their books so that hardbacks often start around \$200 (it looks like Amazon has [this one at \\$382](#)).

This leaves the curious minister with a few options: 1) buy the book. Nope. 2) Download the ebook. Not available as an ebook. 3) Obtain an interlibrary loan. Good move, but this still depends on somebody in some library dropping the \$275 to purchase the book. 4) Visit a theological library. I recommend this one.

The good news for this title is that Eerdmans saw that it had some mass market appeal (I use that term loosely) and published it in a [more accessible format](#) for \$60 (which now feels cheap). Readers can't depend on this always happening. So, it remains a good thing that there are some libraries who purchase significant scholarly titles in print for the benefit of all.



A Few More Footnotes

1. It was nice to review the data in **Trace S. Hebert, "Report to the Presidents of Church of Christ Affiliated Colleges and Universities: Enrollment Trends," *Journal of Faith and the Academy* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 46-60.** A few takeaways: 1) The 14 institutions included in the study enroll 34,984 students (Fall 2018), which is only slightly down from the 35,983 of Fall 2011, 2) So the raw numbers are not what is keeping (many) administrators up at night. That number is the number of freshmen who align with Churches of Christ among these 14 schools, which has decreased from 4,411 in 2000 to 2,004 in 2018. The anxiety around these numbers are not sectarian, per se ("We're losing our campus identity") but also a nod to the fact that many of these schools have had national (and international) recruiting bases solely because of their faith heritage. Let's be honest, there aren't many students nationwide who travel across the country to attend Division II schools in remote places unless there is a greater reason. The connection to Churches of Christ has been that reason. 3) Hebert then uses his data to interact with a larger conversation about the population decline in Churches of Christ, which I covered [here](#) and [here](#). He recommends that Church of Christ institutions target the Churches of Christ that are most likely to have students (and have the type of students most likely to attend college). He recommends that these schools focus on the 1,812 churches who have more than 200 adherents, which are more likely to have strong youth programs and are typically near urban centers (where students have a higher likelihood of attending college).
2. Another article: **Eliza Stiles and Sharon Ketcham, "After Modesty Culture: Living into the Hope of Our Redeemed Bodies," *Journal of Youth Ministry* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 88-115.** It begins with a camp counselor talking about the dress code to a 14-year old camper, trying to explain the rules (no short shorts, spaghetti straps, etc). I'm not a fan of many conversations on modesty because they blame girls for a guy's problems. I don't remember Jesus saying, "any man who looks at a woman should tell her to wear different clothes." Because of this, I had hope for this article. The authors offer a really nice sounding theoretical solution to a really practical issue. However, they hardly landed on specifics that can be communicated to a 14-year old camper-- in a handbook-- in a short period of time. While "no spaghetti straps" is an imperfect rule, it is short, memorable, printable, and practical. This is why camp policies come in prose that rarely gets mistaken for Plato's *Republic*. There is a reason that school hallways have policies like "No Running" rather than, "Embrace the fullness of each moment," and tell students not to smoke rather than to tell them to practice holistic wellness in all things.
3. Okay, one more: Marilyne Robinson, "[Which Way to the City on a Hill?](#)" *New York Review of Books* (July 2019). This is a brilliant piece of writing. My favorite takeaway was her observation that we get locked into using particular words that have no particular meaning other than the pejorative one we assign them. She mentions *capitalistic* and *Puritanical* as examples. In both cases, those words have vast, rich meanings that we have reduced into punchy little stereotypes either about greed or sexual regulations. Really nice work.
4. Looks like [someone tried to hack](#) Tish Harrison Warren's *Liturgy of the Ordinary*. You can [find her response here](#).
5. "[I Befriended Bart Ehrman by Debating Him](#)."
6. Early mosaics depicting Christ from Exodus [found in Galilee](#).
7. Link between [religious upbringing and physical/mental health](#).
8. NBA veteran Darren Collison [retires from NBA](#)...to devote time to his faith as a Jehovah's Witness.
9. Gallup estimates that less than 5% of America's population is gay. [Americans think it is much higher](#).



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UPCOMING
July 22
Summer Break

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