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HARDING
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Footnotes¹

¹Curated Resources for Ministers

March 12, 2020

Hey friends,

If I were really on top of things, I'd have something today like "I interviewed five preachers on how their churches are preparing for Coronavirus." Unfortunately, I prep these emails pretty far in advance, so I'm not real up on the news in this issue. There are still some things in here that will hopefully enrich your ministry.

Enjoy.

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Every Friday I go into work at 6:30, turn on the desk lamp, sit in a comfortable chair, and browse the print journals we received that week. I get ninety uninterrupted minutes to drink coffee and do what many people assume librarians do all the time (sit around and read). This slot each week helps me keep up with the people, topics, movements, and trends that are shaping the religious environment. While print journals are facing their own struggles, the tactile act of holding a magazine and reading it without any digital distractions is something we need to preserve. This week I've included a few pieces I picked up while reading the journals, including a life retrospective by Ronald Sider, whose work on poverty has been instrumental in my thinking.

Also:

- More religious: Cat owners or Dog owners?
- God and Mammon
- Less-Frequently Asked Questions
- Trump and Seminary
- A Few More Footnotes.



Ronald Sider Reflects on His Career in Social Justice and Ministry

Ronald J. Sider, "Living with Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger," *Missiology: An International Review* 48, no. 1 (2020): 29-38.

One of the most influential books of graduate school for me was Ronald Sider's classic *Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America*. This book followed the volume that brought him onto the scene: *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*.

Recently Sider spoke at the American Society of Missiology about his career of work since *Rich Christians*. He admits that he was totally under-qualified to write the book, but remains grateful that God used him in this way. He developed his material while doing urban ministry in Philadelphia.

Sider is a Christian--and a rather theologically conservative one. Conversations on poverty can often become polarized: liberals blame systemic power structures that disadvantage the poor, while conservatives talk about dependency and family breakdown. Sider's book distinguished itself because he had the audacity to affirm both sides of two different polarizations.

The political polarization is between **systems** and individual **responsibility**.

The faith polarization is between **justice** and **evangelism**.

Somehow in *Just Generosity* Sider makes the case that *all four* of these realities are things to which Christians should be fully devoted. To argue the systemic: "Today we must develop appropriating intervening processes in society to restore access to productive resources for everyone" (91). He blames tax cuts for the rich and unnecessary global wars for taking money that should have been used for the poor (180). But that wasn't the whole story, either. He devotes a chapter to single parenthood, saying "marital status is a better predictor of who will become poor than education, race, neighborhood, or family background" (151). Before we jump to race and increased incarceration rates to explain single parenthood, it is worth considering Charles Murray's *Coming Apart*, which shows that the number of white children born to unwed parents has increased drastically. Between 1980 and 2015, the percentage of white babies born to non-married couples skyrocketed [from 9% to 29%](#).

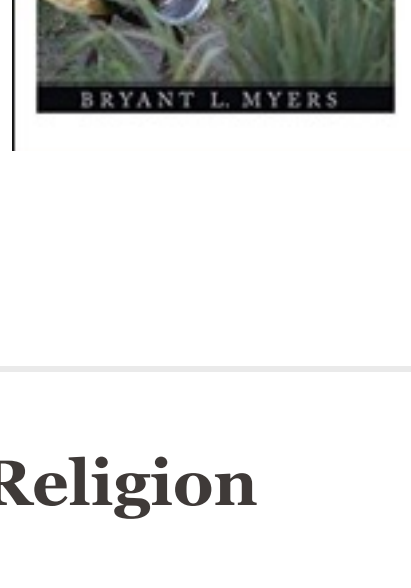
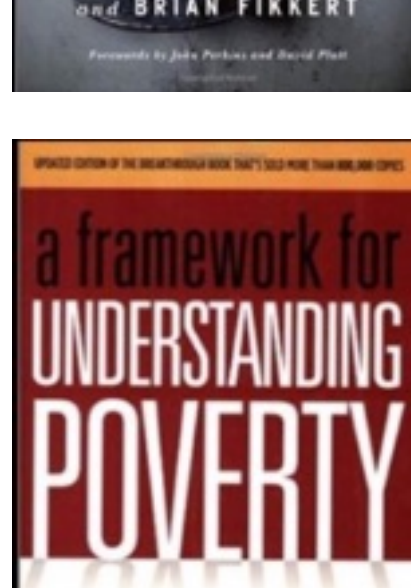
When it comes to justice vs. evangelism he has the same deft touch. He says that we cannot do one without the other. He affirms a conservative (evangelical) view of Scripture, while lamenting that "81% of white evangelicals voted for a racist, sexist, idolatrous nationalist in 2016." He then defends evangelism in the justice vs. evangelism debate by making the case that traditions who lean toward evangelism have begun taking justice much more seriously. But have traditions who are serious about justice taken evangelism more seriously?

Sider finds a spot where he acknowledges systemic problems, but proposes ways that individual Christians and churches can make a difference (his original book title was *The Graduated Tithe*, if that gives you an idea of some of his solution). Sider and his wife identify as Mennonites and "Canadian farm kids." So, American politics and political activism aren't really his thing.

Why do I love Sider?

1. **Connection between individual discipleship and justice.** I'm not confident global justice will come through those unwilling to make individual sacrifices.
2. **Significance of the church.** The world needs the church and the church needs to serve the world. Sider isn't interested in doing work in any other name than Jesus's.
3. **Suspicion of government.** Sider is not anti-government, per se, but his Anabaptist roots call him to remember that the state is a type of Babylon. Or as his friend Tony Campolo says, "America might be the best Babylon, but it is still Babylon."

A few other titles that have helped me appreciate the challenges of poverty and the ways that Christians can respond:



Cats, Dogs, and Religion

Samuel L. Perry and Ryan P. Burge, "How Religion Predicts Pet Ownership in the United States," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (2019): 1-12.

Recent studies suggest that dog owners are more likely to come to church than cat owners.

The details:

- Americans love pets. We own more than any other country. We have 1.7 pets per person, including 70 million dogs. We also lead in ownership of cats and fish.
- Estimated 2018 spending on pets sits at nearly [76 billion dollars](#). Only the U.S. and China had a defense budget that outpaced that number in 2018.
- Pet ownership trends toward rural communities and the more politically conservative.
- Dog owners are more likely to be extroverted. Dogs require walking, and dogs are more appreciated by families. Churches tend to attract families.
- Cat owners are more socially isolated, and are more comfortable being alone than dog owners.
- Cat owners are more urban and Democratic. This might also relate to noise, since barking dogs are discouraged in urban settings.
- Dog owners are more rural and Republican.
- The average pet owner in the country is a white, high-earning female dog owner in a rural setting, with 1.72 pets, 1.86 children, no college degree who goes to church 3 times per month.
- Evangelicals and Catholics own more pets than Mainline Protestants.
- Biblical literalists own fewer pets than those who think Scripture is inspired but not to be taken literally.
- One can take the research a few ways: pet owners don't find a need for the social interaction provided by church, or churchgoers don't find a need for the social interaction afforded by pet ownership.
- On why churchgoers aren't as into cats: "the type of Americans attracted to cats might also be the same Americans who find social situations in church unappealing."



Less-Frequently Asked Questions

Fake questions that you may be asking.

I like the idea of a Bible reading plan, but haven't found the right one.

Try the Bible Project [READ SCRIPTURE](#) app.

What about magazine subscriptions?

Commonweal is consistently strong, as [print+digital](#) is only \$25 per year. If you like your Catholicism a bit more conservative, then go with *First Things*.

My in-laws want gift ideas. I like print books, but want to take notes on digital devices.

Try a [C-Pen Reader](#). I know, pricey.

TV recommendations?

Not much. *The Good Place* does a great job of digging in on some ethical matters. The Netflix special on Bill Gates's brain was well done, too.

Movies?

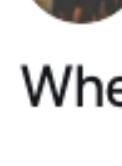
Wrong newsletter.

Easter is coming soon. Any tips?

More Christians should prepare elements of "Lamb for Eight Persons Four Times" from Robert Farrar Capon's *The Supper of the Lamb* for Sunday dinner. Simply classic. If that's too ambitious, invite Irish Catholic friends over on March 17th and serve them home-brined corned beef with cabbage. You'll have fun. Tell them you now subscribe to *Commonweal*.



Trump Attends Seminary

 Taylor Lock @Taylor_Lock

When Trump attends one seminary class...



This is the basic New Testament content that Rick Oster and Allen Black taught so many of us, albeit packaged a bit differently.



God & Mammon

I've interviewed Jamin Speer a few times for *Footnotes*. He teaches Economics at the University of Memphis. I'm thrilled he has started his own monthly email God & Mammon. [You should sign up.](#)



A Few More Footnotes

1. I wrote about my professional mentor Don Meredith and the research papers he received between 1983-2017 for *Restoration Quarterly* (62, no. 1 2020). Reply and I can send you a copy.
2. Pliny the Elder's [remains found in Pompeii](#).
3. Last issue I shared David Brooks's significant article, "[The Nuclear Family Was a Mistake](#)." I love Andrew Walker's response to those wanting a strong, close family: [find a church](#).
4. Do liberal professors indoctrinate their students? [Not really](#).



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March 23
The Digital Age

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