



## ***LOOKING FOR A GOOD BOOK TO READ THIS SUMMER?***

### **The Reformed Institute Director Presents the 2016 “Not Quite Beach Reading” List**

Brueggemann, Walter. *Chosen?--Reading the Bible Amid the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Westminster/John Knox, 2015)

The author of this book is a distinguished Biblical scholar who taught for many years at Columbia Theological Seminary in Georgia. The book is short (just over 50 pages of actual text, accompanied by a study guide), and it does exactly what the subtitle suggests. It explores the meaning and significance of such Biblical ideas as the "chosen people" and the "holy land" in the light of the current conflict between the modern nation of Israel and the Palestinian people. It is written from a point of view that is sharply critical of Israeli policy and sympathetic to the claims of the Palestinians.

Gerrish, B.A. *Christian Faith--Dogmatics in Outline* (Westminster/John Knox, 2015)

The author of this book, who is known primarily for his work as a historian of Christian theology, taught for many years at the University of Chicago Divinity School and then later at the Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. The book is designed to be a constructive statement of the essentials of Christian theology which addresses systematically most of the big issues raised by Christian beliefs. As one might expect of a book which is the product of many years of teaching about the history of Christian thought (especially on the Protestant side), it is not light reading. But it is written in a style that is on the whole quite clear, and my guess is that it will not take long for it to achieve the status of "must" reading for those who are interested in its subject matter.

McGrath, Alister. *Emil Brunner--A Reappraisal* (Wiley/Blackwell, 2014)

Emil Brunner (1899-1966) was one of the major figures of Protestant theology in the twentieth century. A Swiss theologian who, unlike Karl Barth, spent much of his time in the English-speaking world, was highly influential in Presbyterian circles, especially in the United States. He contributed significantly to the great neo-orthodox

*over*

surge in the middle decades of that century and at times competed with Barth for influence. But Barth was the more radical of the two in that respect, and ultimately he eclipsed Brunner. In this biography Alister McGrath does a nice job of retelling Brunner's story, in the process reminding contemporary readers of how important a contribution he made.

Pettegree, Andrew. *Brand Luther--1517, Printing and the Making of the Reformation* (Penguin, 2015)

Historians have often said that it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for the Protestant Reformation to unfold (much less succeed) as it did if its proponents had not had access to the printing press--and the communications revolution the invention of that device set in motion. This book, which is the work of a well-known Reformation historian at the University of St. Andrews, examines that claim at length, and in a way that retells the Luther story in a fresh and engaging way.

Robinson, Marilynne. *The Givenness of Things--Essays* (Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2015)

This is yet another collection of new essays by Marilynne Robinson, the Pulitzer prize winning novelist who characterizes herself as a Calvinist and is almost certainly the most prominent representative of Reformed thought in American culture today. The range of topics covered in these essays is broad, but many are explicitly theological; and they demonstrate magnificently how it is possible to think deeply while at the same time speaking suggestively to the challenges and concerns of everyday life. Some of the essays have interesting things to say about the Reformation and its impact on the subsequent course of events as well.

Wuthnow, Robert. *Inventing American Religion--Polls, Surveys and the Tenuous Quest for a Nation's Faith* (Oxford 2015)

The author of this book is one of the best known scholarly analysts of religious life in this country today. He is a sociologist who has long taught at Princeton University, and in this book he provides a searching critique of the common practice today (among scholars, journalists and religious professionals as well) of relying heavily on survey data to make sense of what is taking place in our religious life. He provides an interesting account of how and why this happened, and on that basis he then shows what is problematic about it. The heart of the problem is this: the difficulty researchers have, especially when they rely simply on telephone interviews, in getting truly representative samples of the groups they are studying. This is turning out to be a serious problem, and Wuthnow discusses it in a way that should be interesting and accessible to any informed person.