

Connections

A monthly letter calling the church to faithful new life

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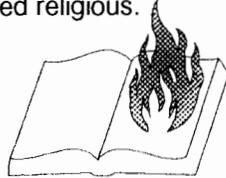


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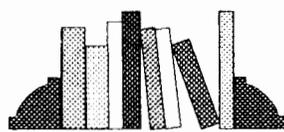
Reading under the eye of God

Reading has been an important route to God for me. I often find God's word coming to me through a book, even if it's not one that is generally considered religious.

Many centuries ago a monk described this powerful experience. He was referring to the meditative reading of scripture, but for me, what he describes often happens during other kinds of reading too. "We read under the eye of God," he said, "until the heart is touched and leaps to flame."



Many kinds of books can light a fire



I read a lot, and I read a wide variety of books and articles. Some are fiction and some are non-fiction. Their styles range from popular to scholarly.

I read theological views that range from fundamentalist to radical. Considering many viewpoints helps me clarify my own. It helps me develop stronger and more mature faith.

I especially like to read people's views and personal stories in their own words. I find that reading only a summary or analysis, especially if it's written by an opponent, sometimes gives a distorted picture.

Responding to a request

Connections readers often tell me they'd like a list of the books about the church and personal spiritual growth that I've found most helpful. Because these readers say



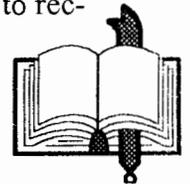
that having such a list would help them in choosing the few books they find time to read, I'm making this issue of *Connections* a catalog of some of my favorites. I know that some *Connections* readers have no interest in a list of books, but I hope I've rung their bell in past months and will ring it again in future ones.



As you read my list, I hope you'll do with it what Morton Kelsey asks of the readers of one of his recent books, *Reaching: The Journey to Fulfillment* (Augsburg, 1994). "The reader should approach this book as a grazing cow approaches a pasture," Kelsey suggests, "munching here and there, savoring what is pleasing and tasty. The cow does not get upset or annoyed at what is distasteful or even dangerous; she just passes it by."

Eye-openers about the Bible

For years I had the vague but persistent suspicion that some of the Bible's words weren't meant to be taken literally or to apply to all times and situations. However, I never heard anyone else say that, so I assumed I was mistaken. Finally books like the ones about the Bible that I'm listing here (and some about Jesus, like those I mentioned in last month's *Connections*) helped me to recognize how the Bible communicates God's word to us. These books helped me see the real message of the Bible, which I'd been missing.



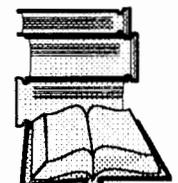
The language of symbols and metaphors



One book that opened my eyes to important aspects of the Bible's message that I'd been totally unaware of was *The Kingdom Within: A Study of the Inner Meaning of Jesus' Sayings* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), by John Sanford, an Episcopal priest and Jungian analyst. Another was *Ego and Archetype: Individuation and the Religious Function of the Psyche*, by Edward F. Edinger (Shambhala, 1992). Edinger is tough reading; Sanford isn't. Both of these were crucial in showing me the role that ritual and symbols play in the Bible, in our sacraments, and in other religious practices.

Culture's influence on the Bible

Dirt Greed & Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today, by L. William Countryman (Fortress, 1988), and *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism and Living in Sin: A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1992 and 1990), by John Shelby Spong, an Episcopal bishop, present views that are controversial and can be jolting. However, they're views that I believe all Christians need to consider seriously. ❖



Developing mature faith

The Edge of Adventure: An Experiment in Faith, by Keith Miller and Bruce Larson (now out of print), was life-changing for me. When Miller wrote his part of it, he was a churchgoing businessman who was frustrated by church members' refusal to address or even admit the church's problems. He tells about his feelings and concerns, and his discovery of real faith.



A Testament of Devotion, by Thomas R. Kelly (HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), is a potent faith statement by an American Quaker who died in 1941.

Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation (Upper Room, 1985), is by M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., a professor at Asbury Theological Seminary. The talks on which this book is based were tremendously exciting for me when I heard them in the Academy for Spiritual Formation.



I didn't expect the teachings of 4th-and-5th-century desert monks to apply to life today, but they do, as Henri J. Nouwen makes powerfully clear in his inspiring book

The Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry (Ballantine, 1985). ❖

Seeing your real self, your gifts, and your calling

Please Understand Me: Character & Temperament Types, by David Keirse and Marilyn Bates (Prometheus Nemesis, 1978), has meant a lot to me. Discovering the way of looking at personality types that it describes helped me appreciate myself and the people around me. It showed me that being my real self was okay, and that other people weren't necessarily being stupid, sinful, or deliberately obnoxious when they didn't act exactly like me.



Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning, by James W. Fowler (HarperSanFrancisco, 1981), was similarly helpful. It

We have gifts that differ ...
—Romans 12:6

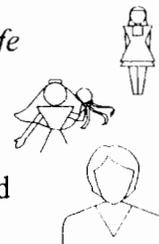
helped me see why all church members don't want the same things I want from the church and don't approach faith exactly as I do. Fowler's *Life Maps* (with Sam Keen, now out of print) deals with the same subject but is much shorter and easier to read.

You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation, by Deborah Tannen (Ballantine, 1994), is another book that helped me feel better about the differences in people.

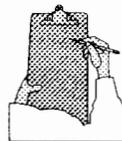


Why Am I Afraid To Tell You Who I Am? (Tabor, 1990) is by John Powell, a Catholic priest. It is tiny and super-easy-to-read and has a very valuable message. I also love *Our Many Selves*, by Elizabeth O'Connor (out of print).

Women of a Certain Age: The Midlife Search for Self, by Lillian B. Rubin (Borgo, 1990), was wrenching but immensely valuable when I first began to look at how being female had influenced the path I had followed.



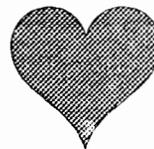
Dreams, God's Forgotten Language, by John Sanford (HarperSanFrancisco, 1989), and *Dreams: A Way to Listen to God*, by Morton T. Kelsey (Paulist, 1978), helped me see how God guides us through dreams. Kelsey's *Transcend: A Guide to the Spiritual Quest* (Continuum, 1994) and *Adventure Inward: Christian Growth through Personal Journal Writing* (Augsburg, 1980) also helped me see God's guidance.



Dealing with the past and moving on

Necessary Losses: The Loves, Illusions, Dependencies and Impossible Expectations That All of Us Have to Give Up in Order to Grow, by Judith Viorst (Fawcett, 1987), and *Making Peace with Your Parents*, by Harold H. Bloomfield and Leonard Felder (Ballantine, 1984), were valuable to me. They helped me see the need to start relating to my parents as an adult—an essential part of responding to God and developing a mature faith.

The Hunger of the Heart: A Call to Spiritual Growth (Upper Room, 1992), by Ron DelBene, an Episcopal priest and retreat-center director, is about continually having to reconsider feelings and faith

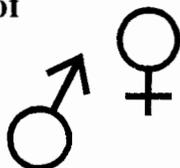


issues that we think we've already disposed of. It is tiny and very easy to read, but very potent.

Clergyman Robert A Raines' description of looking realistically at his life and making changes, in his book *Going Home* (now out of print), helped me in that process. Although I question some of the changes he made, I still find his book gripping, years after I first read it.

Seeing how your view of women's and men's roles affects your view of God, yourself, and others

Jesus According to a Woman (Paulist, 1975) and *Jesus and the Freed Woman* (out of print), by Rachel Conrad Wahlberg, are easy reading that could change your life in very valuable ways. Wahlberg is a Lutheran laywoman and until recently was a teacher in a university business school.



In Whose Image?: God and Gender (Crossroad, 1990), by Jann Aldredge Clanton, a Southern Baptist clergywoman and hospital chaplain, is an excellent presentation in easy-to-read non-academic language. It's the best book I know of on this subject for a general audience. Two others I've especially liked on the same subject are *Women and the Word: The Gender of God in the New Testament and the Spirituality of Women*, by Sandra M. Schneiders (Paulist, 1986), and *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language*, by Sallie McFague (Augsburg Fortress, 1982).

Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West, by Margaret R. Miles (Random, 1991), is rather esoteric and scholarly, but its message is one that I think all Christians need to be aware of.

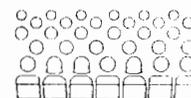


A new favorite of mine is *Memories of God: Theological Reflections on a Life*, by Roberta C. Bondi (Abingdon, 1995). Bondi is a seminary professor who, like me, grew up in a setting that gave her a false and harmful view of women's and men's roles and therefore of what God was like.

A Choice of Heroes: The Changing Face of American Manhood, by Mark Gerzon (Houghton Mifflin, 1992), shows how our traditional expectations of men often harm both men and women.

Many years ago Virginia Woolf saw how hard it was for women to claim their abilities and find ways to use them, as she describes in *A Room of One's Own* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1929/1989). Most of her observations are still true, and her way of stating them is quite compelling. ❖

The church



In *Call to Commitment* (out of print) and *Journey Inward, Journey Outward* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1975), Elizabeth O'Connor uses the innovative Church of the Saviour, in Washington DC, as an example of what God calls the church to be. *The Company of the Committed* and *The Incendiary Fellowship* (out of print), by Elton Trueblood, and *The Emerging Church*, by Bruce Larson and Ralph Osborne (out of print), also challenged and excited me.



Ministry in an Oral Culture and U. S. Lifestyles and Main-line Churches: A Key to Reaching People in the 90's (Westminster/John Knox, 1994 and 1990), by Tex Sample, a professor at the United Methodist Church's St. Paul School of Theology, urge us to speak the language of the people God calls us to minister to. *Consulting the Faithful: What Christian Intellectuals Can Learn from Popular Religion*, by Richard J. Mouw (Eerdmans, 1994), has a similar message.

Looking in the Mirror: Self-Appraisal in the Local Church (Abingdon, 1984), by Lyle E. Schaller, like other books by him on related topics, is very readable and has an urgent message for us.

In *The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the Congregation for a New Mission Frontier* and in *Transforming Congregations for the Future* (Alban Institute, 1991 and 1994), Loren B. Mead shows why today's and tomorrow's churches need to differ from yesterday's.



In *The Paralysis of Mainstream Protestant Leadership* (Abingdon, 1990), J. Edward Carothers, a former United Methodist Church executive, makes observations about church bureaucracy and the theological gap between laity and clergy that I believe are sadly accurate and urgently in need of our attention.



In Search of the Church: New Testament Images for Tomorrow's Congregations, by Keith A. Russell

(Alban Institute, 1994), suggests how the essential features of the early church could be developed in today's church. It's an excellent, interesting book.

A changing list

In making this list I've realized that some books that I loved a few years ago no longer seem as lovable to me as they once did, but other favorites of earlier years are still favorites. God apparently wants all of us to keep using some of the guidance

that God has given us earlier but also to turn loose of some as we grow. God keeps sending us new instructions and insights to fit the new situations into which God has led us and the changed people that God has led us to become.

Happy reading . . . ❖

Barbara

Next month . . .

Heresy—some Christians are terribly worried about it, but is God?



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Reading under the eye of God



Eye-opening books about God's justice

Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament (1984); *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (1993); and *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (1992, all Augsburg Fortress), by Walter Wink, are heavy reading but worth it, in my view. Wink discusses what the Bible calls "principalities and powers," in today's terms.



The Prophetic Imagination, by Walter Brueggemann (Augsburg Fortress, 1978) is another book I've loved. Brueggemann's style is rather scholarly, but I find the content exciting, challenging, and very important. He applies the Old Testament prophets' message to today's church and world. It's a message that I believe today's Christians need to hear and take to heart.

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