Prof’s Picks Inaugural

October 2011

The Very Rev. Ian Markham, Dean and President:

*Guns, Germs, and Steel* by Jared Diamond. A substantial study that explores the history of economic development across the world and outlines various geographical factors that played a significant role.

*Only One Way?* by Gavin D’Costa, Paul Knitter and Daniel Strange. Three leading voices in the Theology of Other Religions debate come together to write this thoughtful book. Discussion is substantial and covers the theological spectrum.

The Rev. Roger Ferlo, Associate Dean/Professor of Religion and Culture

I recommend Robert Bellah’s new book, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age*. Bellah is an Episcopalian, and a professor emeritus, Cal/Berkeley. He is the principal author of *Habits of the Heart*, a groundbreaking book in the sociology of American religion. This new book is his magnum opus and should be read alongside Charles Taylor’s *Secular Age*.

Dr. Timothy Sedgwick, Associate Dean/Professor of Christian Ethics

*The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration* by Isabel Wilkerson. Based upon more than a thousand interviews with the last of Black Americans who migrated from the South in the 20th century, Wilkerson follows the lives of three individuals to New York, Chicago and Los Angeles and their reasons to leave, hopes to fulfill, divisions of race to navigate. The book reads like a novel that illumines their untold story and the American history of Reconstruction and Jim Crow laws.

The Rev. David T. Gortner, PhD., Director/DMin Programs; Professor of Evangelism and Congregational Leadership

I highly recommend *Forces for Good: Six Practices of High-Impact Nonprofits* by Leslie Crutchfield and Heather McLeod Grant. This exceptional study highlights the best approaches to work by 12 very strong and different nonprofits. Their effectiveness is not due to great mission statements, perfect management, big budgets, or the perfect big idea. This is a must-read for any church, school and ministry leaders who want to increase their organization’s impact in order to change.

The Rev. Dr. Joyce Mercer, Professor of Practical Theology
My pick is *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. Robert Putnam and David Campbell, sociologists of religion, explore the shape of contemporary American religious life, looking at the experience of religious pluralism. They claim the very fact of pluralism here contributes to a general tolerance of religious difference that is distinctive. They also chart the shifts in American religious identities in terms of “an earthquake and two aftershocks” in the mid-20th century – namely, the sexual revolution of the 1960's; the rise of conservative evangelical Christianity as a political force in reaction to this quake; and in the 90’s and beyond, the rejection by young people of all religion because of religion’s identification with this conservative movement.

Dr. Jonathan Gray, Assistant Professor of Church History

I am currently reading Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Cost of Discipleship*. Bonhoeffer is not afraid to describe the call of Christ as what it is: a radical, comprehensive invitation to devote ourselves entirely to him. This book will challenge you to abandon spiritual mediocrity.

Dr. Mitze Budde, Professor and Head Librarian

*Ecumenism Means You, Too: Ordinary Christians and the Quest for Christian Unity* by Steven R. Harmon. A Baptist professor and ecumenist seeks to educate young adults on the ecumenical movement through the rock music of U2.

Dr. Stephen Cook, Professor of Old Testament

I recommend the alums take a look at the new *Common English Bible*. It is quite fun to compare it to other translations. Often, the Bible comes across in quite a fresh manner in this brand new translation.

Dr. Judy Fentress-Williams, Associate Professor of Old Testament

This summer I read a gem of a book entitled *People of the Book* by Geraldine Brooks, which tells the many stories behind an illuminated manuscript, the Sarajevo Haggadah. The author managed to achieve the right balance between attention to historic detail, fascinating characters and an imaginative plot that ties it all together.

The Rev. Dr. Katherine Sonderegger, Professor of Theology

I recommend *Encounters with Silence* by Karl Rahner. These are retreat meditations by the great 20th century Roman Catholic theologian. They center on the mystery of God, and the silence that is a mark both of God’s distance and nearness to us. They capture the deep devotion, honesty and courage that are hallmarks of Rahner’s theology.

Dr. William Roberts, Professor of Music
I enjoyed *The Rest is Noise* by Alex Ross. It is a fascinating book about 20th century music that reads like a novel. The author is music critic for *The New Yorker*. 