



## **Rector's Essay - Reading with the Rector**

By Jarrett Kerbel (05/22/26)

Summer reading season is upon us! At camp, or at the beach, or in a hammock in the yard, summer is a great time for books. Here are some books I recommend for summer reading for all ages:

**How (Not) to Be Secular** by James KA Smith. This is an excellent book about a great book. Charles Taylor wrote his massive 900 page book Secularism about 20 years ago. Smith offers a much shorter and accessible commentary on Taylor's magisterial work that speaks directly to the struggles of faith in a social imaginary dominated by exclusive humanism. Ever wonder how the world became so indifferent to the questions and answers offered by faith? This book provides a clear picture of how we arrived at this point and how faith still answers our deepest cravings for meaning and orientation in the world. I will offer a Reading with the Rector conversation about this book in June. I think it is VERY important.

**Reading Genesis** by Marilynne Robinson. Easily the most thought provoking and compelling reading of the first book of the Bible that I know. The great essayist and novelist Marilynne Robinson makes a compelling case for God's providence working itself out across the stories of oh so human people in the saga that is Genesis. Ever wonder why God would work with such an eccentric and abrasive group of people as partners in the Divine enterprise of revelation and restoration? This book will give you a new lens to take to the beginning of our story with God.

**Gilead** by Marilynne Robinson. If you have not yet read this modern American classic, run, do not walk, to get yourself a copy. Robinson, a long-time instructor at the Iowa Writers Workshop, is one of our greatest prose stylists today. The fictional town of Gilead, Iowa and the families of two preachers in the town serve as the focus of four related novels. Gilead brings together theology, American history, and family

struggles all into one compelling, gentle narrative. I cannot recommend this book and the other three in the series highly enough. [Lila](#), [Home](#), and [Jack](#).

[Being Reasonable: The Case for a Misunderstood Virtue](#) by Krista Lawlor. If there ever was a book written for our moment in history, this is the one. How do we recover the virtue of reasonable engagement with each other? How do we exchange reasons and make sense together in such an irrational season? Offering reasons for actions and belief is a fundamental obligation for creatures of the human kind. For Episcopalians we claim reason as one of the three legs of our three legged stool with Scripture and Tradition, but do we know what we mean when we say it?

[The Permeable Self: Five Medieval Relationships](#) by Barbara Newman. According to Charles Taylor, the modern self is especially lonely, arid and alienated because in our disenchantment we lost a basic permeability of self that helped us connect to people, God, and the world beyond our buffered selves. Barbara Newman - professor of English and Religion at Northwestern University and expert on Hildegard of Bingen - uses the lens of permeability to look closely at how medieval people experienced the world. One way to understand what we have lost and what can be regained is to drop our prejudice against our medieval forebears and learn from them how to inhabit relationships in a fresh way. Newman was my thesis advisor at Northwestern and I cannot recommend her enough as a lucid thinker and writer.

[To Live Well: Practical Wisdom for Moving through Chaotic Times](#) by Justin Whitmel Earley. As you may have noticed I am a huge advocate of educating all people in the classic and biblical virtues. This book is especially appropriate for high school youth and parents. With splendid clarity and concision, the author walks through the classic and biblical virtues which provide crucial orientation to life in an unsteady world. My passion for the virtues comes from my own struggles to find practical wisdom I could trust in a world seemingly gone mad. In response, I would like to provide virtue education for our youth and this is one place to start. The chapter on "Loving Rightly" does tread into areas of sexual identity and traditional marriage that I disagree with and you might as well, but if you read it with your children this can provide a springboard for conversation and clarification of what you believe and why.

Happy Reading this Summer! One cause for celebration for me is that so many of the great theologians of the present moment are Anglicans! You might look up Rowan Williams, Kathy Tanner, Sarah Coakley, or Mark McIntosh (*Mystical Theology*). Also, many of the best Philosophers of our time are Christians! Dallas Willard, Robert Merrihew Adams, David Bentley Hart, James KA Smith, and Charles Taylor. Please explore these awesome thinkers and writers! Personally, the smartest thinkers I know are people of faith so enough of this unwarranted secular snobbishness!