

Lenten Reading List 2020

† ***Great Lent*** by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann. Recommended by Arch. Kallistos Ware as the best single volume about Lent in English, this book has become a “classic” that should be read by one and all. After reading this book, you will never approach the Lenten services in exactly the same way. In fact, you just may want to come to church more often during Great Lent. This book includes the great appendix chapter, “Taking Lent Seriously” which you will do after reading this book!

† ***The Lenten Spring*** by Fr. Thomas Hopko. Also already something of a “classic.” This is a series of forty three-four page meditations on a variety of lenten themes. A wonderful use of the Scriptures and the Church’s Lenten hymnography, together with Fr. Hopko’s endless stream of great insights.

† ***The Way of the Ascetics*** by Tito Colliander, a Finnish Orthodox lay theologian, and another “classic”(!). Short insightful chapters that are very challenging in today’s world about an “applied Orthodoxy” in our daily living.

† ***Prayer: An Encounter With the Living God*** by Metropolitan Ilarion Alfeyev. A relatively new book by one of today’s most prolific and gifted theologians/spiritual directors. Short straightforward chapters that yield many insights into the practice of serious and effective prayer. Very practical and quite helpful for that very reason.

† ***The Passion of Christ*** by Veselin Kesich. This was my New Testament professor at St. Vladimir’s Seminary. A compact and clearly-written account of the Lord’s death on the Cross. Prof. Kesich walks you through the Lord’s earthly ministry and all of the factors that led to the Lord’s Passion. In only about a hundred pages, this book will illuminate a great deal for you as we move toward Holy Week during Great Lent.

† ***The Power of the Name: The Jesus Prayer in Orthodox Spirituality*** by Archbishop Kallistos Ware. Certainly the best short introduction to the Jesus Prayer by a lifelong student and practitioner of the great “prayer of the heart.” Arch. Ware distills years of study and practice into an unforgettable forty-page treatise. Yes - another classic!

† ***The Place of the Heart*** by Elizabeth Behr-Sigel. The author has been described as the “grandmother” of 20th c. Orthodox writers. A European lay theologian, Behr-Sigel’s book is subtitled “An Introduction to Orthodox Spirituality.” This is a far-ranging description of how our immensely rich spiritual tradition developed from the Scriptures to the present day. A very rich presentation. Actually, Arch. Ware’s essay on *The Power of the Name* is included here as an Appendix.

† ***Becoming Human*** by Fr. John Behr. A marvelous and profound meditation - accompanied by iconographic images - on the Person of Christ and how Christ is the link toward our own true humanity. Many great new insights here that Fr. John has put into a short meditative form based on his other scholarly studies of the early Christian tradition. A profound link is made between Christ - the one true human being - and our own emerging humanity after His image.

† ***God’s Many-Splendored Image*** by Nonna Verna Harrison. Verna Harrison is an Orthodox nun, known as Sister Nonna. She is also a highly-respected patristic scholar and theologian. This book explores “theological anthropology for Christian formation.” That sounds rather intimidating, but prominent readers have said that “clarity, simplicity, beauty, and depth” characterize the content and style of this book. A truly wonderful exploration of what it means to be, as a human being, “God’s many-splendored image.” Insightful observations are made in this book about figures ranging from desert fathers to Albert Einstein. Sister Nonna dedicated the book “to all people whom other people have thrown away. It shows that God does not throw away people.” Who would not want to read a book with a dedication like that?

† ***The Sayings of the Desert Fathers - The Alphabetical Collection*** Benedicta Ward (editor and translator). Here are the multitude of aphorisms, anecdotes and wisdom sayings of the great desert fathers arranged alphabetically (the Gk. alphabet, that is) from the letters Alpha to Omega, and everything in between. These are the words of life from the great pioneers of Christian asceticism and the spiritual life. We read the words of Sts. Anthony the Great, Arsenius, and Macarius the Great and a host of other spiritual guides. An endless source of wisdom that can be read through the years.

† ***How To Be A Sinner*** by Dr. Peter Bouteneff. This is an excellent new book that is endlessly insightful when answering the difficult question: What does it mean when I call myself a sinner?

Dr. Bouteneff takes us on a journey down the “royal road,” avoiding a dark, guilt-ridden path of self-lacerating; and a superficial therapeutic approach designed to relieve us of any deep responsibility for our sins. Balanced and honest, this book will surprise you with its probing analysis.

† ***Thirty Steps to Heaven*** by Vasilios Papavassiliou. Fr. Vasilios “walks” us up the Ladder of Divine Ascent by “translating” St. John’s classic monastic text *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* into a style and analysis that has a layperson living in the world primarily in mind. Yet, his commentary is not “watered down” so as to lose the depth and challenging vision of St. John. Very accessible and very practical for today’s Orthodox Christian.

† ***First Fruits of Prayer - A Forty Day Journey Through the Canon of St. Andrew*** by Frederica Mathewes-Green. Similar in style and tone to Fr. Vasilios’ book mentioned right above. But here this prolific contemporary Orthodox author takes us through the classic Canon of St. Andrew, chanted on the first four evenings of Great Lent; and then again on the Thursday of the Fifth Week of Great Lent. Fine resource for the scriptural content of St. Andrew’s famous work.