
What Are You Reading This Summer?

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After my newsletter article about listening to the radio on a particular Sunday morning, I received all sorts of responses. Some agreed with my selections, and others were highly recommending that I should have been listening to something else! (Of those other radio recommendations, I must certainly mention our own Day1! It features weekly Sunday sermons that are among the best in country. However, on the particular Sunday morning I wrote about, far away from familiar Atlanta, I had no idea where Day1 was on the dial - plus I was listening a bit later in the morning...)

At any rate, the most frequent question I receive in the summer is not about radio or music, or even television or movies. It is: "What are you reading?" Many of us use the extended hours of summer for more reading; and I use several weeks in June each year as a study leave, a period for both serious and pleasurable reading.

I have benefitted from some great reads recently. One is *The Wisdom of Stability*, by Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, who tries to interpret the monastic vow of stability for ordinary Christians in our own busy, frantic, and urban, culture. It is a simple and stirring book. Some of you who attend the Sunday Dean's Forum may remember my own presentation on this subject, "The Virtue of Stability." (November 15, 2009)

The Wisdom of Stability reminded me however, of another radio interview I heard, over ten years ago, an interview with the wise sage, Wendell Berry. Here is what I wrote in the *Cathedral Times* for January 10, 1999:

Wendell Berry, the poet and agrarian who lives along the Kentucky River, was interviewed on the radio several weeks ago. It was years ago, after a few years of teaching, that he decided to buy a few acres in Kentucky and simply stay there. Now, he writes while gazing out a forty-pane window at the same site day after day. He has distinguished himself as a man resisting the pull of modern technology. He prefers to work the land.

I am uncertain whether most people could strictly emulate his model. As much as we might long for the agrarian era, ours is not a farming community any longer. Still, the wisdom from such a man has much to teach us. During his interview, Berry was asked what advice he might offer young adults today. He replied in words to this effect: "I would tell them to stop some place and stay there. Learn all about it. Learn what grows and lives there. You can see the stars from almost any place on earth. The length of my vision is limited only by me, not by any one place."

The Wisdom of Stability. I recommend the book, and I pray that each of us finds a new stability this summer. I have also re-read one of the spiritual classics this summer, a classic even though it is definitely twentieth-century. It is the short and beautifully poetic book by Abraham Joshua Heschel, titled simply, *The Sabbath*.

With an exquisite introduction by his daughter, Susannah Heschel (which serves as a handy summary of the entire book), *The Sabbath* is a masterpiece about sacred time. Here's an example of Heschel's holy words:

*Holiness in space, in nature, was known in other religions. New in the teaching of Judaism was that the idea of holiness was gradually shifted from space to time, from the realm of nature to the realm of history, from things to events. The physical world became divested of any inherent sanctity. There were no naturally sacred plants or animals any more. To be sacred, a thing had to be consecrated by a conscious act of man. The quality of holiness is not in the grain of matter. It is a preciousness bestowed upon things by an act of consecration and persisting in relation to God. (Heschel, *The Sabbath*, page 79).*

What are you reading this summer? Drop me a note!

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