

Not Your School's Reading List 2: God and the Human Condition

At *Intellectual Takeout*, we strive to offer not only commentary on current events but also tangible advice for engaging with our increasingly chaotic world. That's why we're proud to present this [ongoing series of literature recommendations](#). This week's entries include works examining our culture's Judeo-Christian religious heritage.

While we don't necessarily agree with all the viewpoints in these books, every author presents interesting and influential ideas on religious ethics, and each text provides insightful commentary on the tenets of the Christian faith, its influence on our society, and its unfortunate decline.

In reverse chronological order, here are ten books to understand God, the human condition, and religion:

1. Stephen de Young. [*God Is a Man of War*](#). 2021.

"A fresh interpretation of Old Testament accounts of violence by exploring them through the twofold lens of Orthodox tradition and historical context. Fr. Stephen De Young inquires into what they reveal about the nature of Christ and His creation. In doing so, this book bears witness to a world filled not only with pain and suffering – often of human making – but also with the love of God."

2. Alice von Hildebrand. [*Man and*](#)

Woman. 2002.

“God chose to create man doubly complex. He made man of both soul and body a spiritual reality and a material reality. To crown this complexity, He created them male and female. Dr. von Hildebrand elucidates the tragic separation that happened with original sin and the consequences of this brokenness in the world today: the distortion of the male and female genius, supernatural blindness, and the triumph of secularism.”

3. Seraphim Rose. Nihilism. 1994.

“Reveals the core of all modern thought and life—the belief that all truth is relative—and shows how this belief has been translated into action in our century. ... This essay is more timely than ever. It clearly explains why contemporary ideas, values, and attitudes—the ‘spirit of the age’—are shifting so rapidly in the direction of moral anarchy, as the philosophy of Nihilism enters more deeply into the fiber of society.”

4. Mircea Eliade. The Sacred and the Profane. 1957.

“Eliade observes that even moderns who proclaim themselves residents of a completely profane world are still unconsciously nourished by the memory of the sacred. Eliade traces manifestations of the sacred from primitive to modern times in terms of space, time, nature, and the cosmos. In doing so he shows how the total human experience of the religious man compares with that of the nonreligious.”

5. C.S. Lewis. Mere Christianity. 1952.

“*Mere Christianity* brings together what Lewis saw as the

fundamental truths of the religion. ... C.S. Lewis finds a common ground on which all those who have Christian faith can stand together, proving that 'at the centre of each there is something, or a Someone, who against all divergences of belief, all differences of temperament, all memories of mutual persecution, speaks the same voice.'"

6. Ivan Ilyin. Foundations of Christian Culture. 1951.

"There was a time when society was inspired by Christian principles. Art, government, society emulated, as much as possible, the search for perfection dictated by the call to virtue. Ultimately, the twentieth century's many disasters (...) have discredited Christianity itself in the eyes of many. Nevertheless, I am convinced that only Christianity can revitalize a culture that has lost most of its connection with beauty."

7. Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The Cost of Discipleship. 1937.

"What can the call to discipleship, the adherence to the word of Jesus, mean today to the businessman, the soldier, the laborer, or the aristocrat? ... *The Cost of Discipleship* is a compelling statement of the demands of sacrifice and ethical consistency from a man whose life and thought were exemplary articulations of a new type of leadership inspired by the Gospel, and imbued with the spirit of Christian humanism."

8. Friedrich Nietzsche. The Gay Science. 1882.

"Nietzsche called *The Gay Science* 'the most personal of all my books.' It was here that he first proclaimed the death of

God—to which a large part of the book is devoted—and his doctrine of the eternal recurrence. The book contains some of Nietzsche's most sustained discussions of art and morality, knowledge and truth, the intellectual conscience and the origin of logic."

9. John Chrysostom. On the Providence of God. 407.

"John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, ... is revered as the Church's greatest homilist and interpreter of Holy Scripture. The present treatise, *On the Providence of God*, was his last work, written at the very end of his life, when he was in exile in the mountains of Armenia. He wrote this work to encourage his faithful flock in Constantinople and elsewhere, who were in distress due to his unjust banishment."

10. Augustine of Hippo. Confessions. 400.

"One of the most influential and most innovative works of Latin literature. Written in the author's early forties in the last years of the fourth century A.D. and during his first years as a bishop, they reflect on his life and on the activity of remembering and interpreting a life. ... Augustine evolves and analyses his past with all the resources of the reading which shaped his mind: Virgil and Cicero, Neoplatonism and the Bible."

—

Image credit (clockwise from top left): Flickr-Lawrence OP, [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#); Flickr-Lawrence OP, [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#); Wikimedia Commons, [PDM 1.0](#); Flickr-Royal Opera House Covenant Garden, [PDM 1.0](#)

ITO