

BISHOP'S EPIPHANY 2023 BOOK LIST

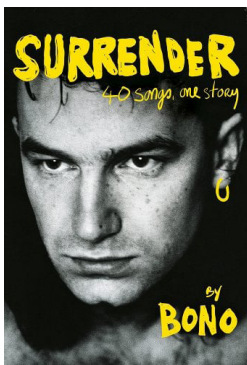
By Bishop Paul-Gordon Chandler

I have always loved those words by the late Argentine poet and short-story writer, Jorge Luis Borges, considered one of the foremost literary figures of the 20th century, "I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library."

The Feast of the Epiphany, always falling on January 6, is referred to in Eastern Christian traditions as Theophany, which is defined as "a visible physical manifestation to humankind of God." In my experience, books have often served as a type of "theophany" (small "t") to me. There can truly be life-giving power between book covers.

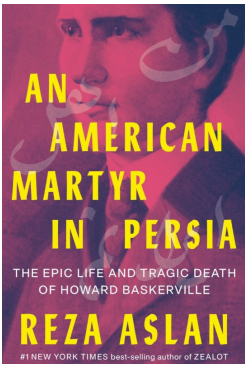
Each Epiphany, I share a list of 12 books that I have found exceptionally profound and/or stimulating during the previous year. They are a mixture of genres – memoir, biography, fiction, spirituality, history, leadership, poetry, etc.

Please note that these books below are not listed in any particular order. Most are new titles, published in 2022. However, there are a few that were published earlier. I trust you enjoy reading through this list and perhaps will be led to explore some of these books yourself.



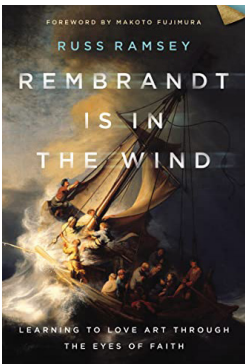
Surrender: 40 Songs, One Story – Bono

This is one of the most engaging and creatively written memoirs I have read. I have always been a fan of U2's music, and have admired how Bono has used the unique platform he has for making a difference in our world. This memoir about his life blew me away. It tells his story, from growing up in the suburbs of Dublin, to becoming the lead singer in one of the most successful music bands of all time. However, it is also a deeply spiritual book, as he shares his own spiritual pilgrimage throughout it. One finds it hard to put a label on Bono as he is in various ways a poet, priest, prophet, and performer – all at once. Underneath it all, one could see this book being a love note to his wife Ali, and their marriage of over 40 years. I couldn't put this book down!



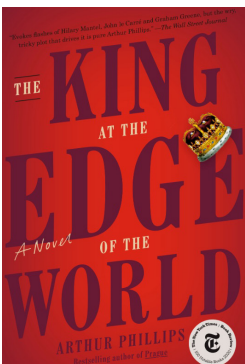
An American Martyr in Persia: The Epic Life and Tragic Death of Howard Baskerville – Reza Aslan

This new book by the Iranian born New York Times best-selling author Reza Aslan, reads like evocative fiction. It tells the fascinating true story of Howard Baskerville, a young American Presbyterian missionary from South Dakota to Persia in the early 1900s. Baskerville was the best possible example of an American missionary, as he allows himself to be educated by the local people, leading him to identify with the struggle for democracy of the Persian students to whom he was teaching English. Baskerville declares, “The only difference between me and these people is the place of my birth, and that is not a big difference.” He ends up being killed, fighting alongside his students in their quest to transform their country. Today Baskerville remains venerated in Iran, where thousands of Iranians visit his grave each year. This book is beautifully written and completely engrossing, with great contemporary relevance.



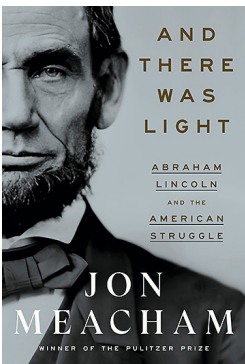
Rembrandt Is in the Wind: Learning to Love Art through the Eyes of Faith – Russ Ramsey

As someone passionate about the arts, I thoroughly enjoyed this book. The author, Russ Ramsey, an art aficionado and the pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church in Nashville, Tennessee, writes in a way that any reader would find engaging, whether knowing about art or not. The book focuses on ten celebrated historical artists (Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Vermeer, Bazille, van Gogh, Tanner, Hopper and Trotter), exploring how their life journeys and creativity can enhance our own faith. Ramsey is like a spiritual guide leading us through a collection of some of the most profound artworks by the greatest artists of Western culture, taking us into a new spiritual depth. A most engaging and inspiring read!



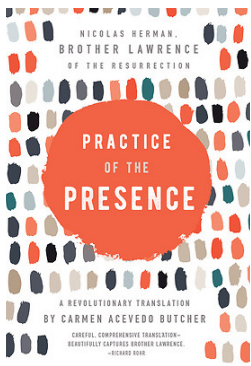
The King at the Edge of the World: A Novel – Arthur Phillips

Novelist Arthur Phillips delves into a gripping exploration of the nature of truth through the creative adventure of an Ottoman Turkish Muslim medical doctor, Mahmoud Ezzedine. Drawn into the 1601 dilemma that Queen Elizabeth I is dying without an heir, the unassuming doctor visits the “backwaters” of Elizabethan England on a diplomatic mission and is entrusted with the task of determining whether King James VI of Scotland (future King James I of England who authorized the “King James” translation of the Bible) is indeed Protestant at heart. Despite an outward rejection of his Catholic mother “Bloody Mary” and her infamous reign, determining the true convictions of King James’ soul is the quest. Set amidst great religious turmoil, intrigue twists this tale toward an unexpected ending. Well worth treating yourself to this journey!



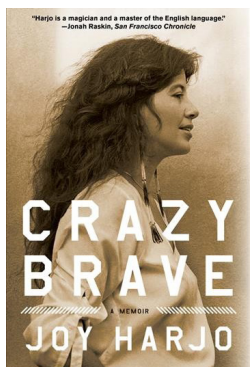
And There Was Light: Abraham Lincoln and the American Struggle – Jon Meacham

This is the newest book by Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer and historian, and Canon Historian of the Washington National Cathedral, Jon Meacham. Against a backdrop of thousands of books on Abraham Lincoln, I found this moving retelling of Lincoln’s life by Meacham to be very inspiring. While not a hagiographical portrayal, Meacham shows the gradual evolution of Lincoln’s belief and the depth of his convictions that ultimately led to the end of slavery in our country. This is a treasure-chest of a book, as Meacham successfully explores the spiritual soul of Lincoln, which makes him such a profoundly inspiring figure. I think this exceptional book should be read by all Americans!



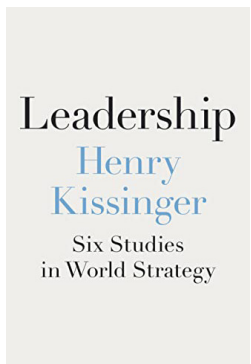
Practice of the Presence: A Revolutionary Translation – Carmen Acevedo Butcher

This is a brand new contemporary translation of a spiritual mystical masterpiece by Brother Lawrence, a humble monastic kitchen worker, first published in 1692. Dr. Carmen Acevedo Butcher, the award-winning translator of spiritual texts, takes the reader into the 17th century world of Brother Lawrence, bringing to life the beautiful spirituality Brother Lawrence discovered of “practicing and experiencing the presence of God” within even the most mundane of tasks, as a “friar of pots and pans.” Brother Lawrence’s spiritual maxims, letters, and assorted conversations are transformational, and this new translation, billed as “revolutionary” in the deepest spiritual sense, is truly remarkable. Brother Lawrence movingly writes and teaches us that the Presence is for all people everywhere. This book could change your life!



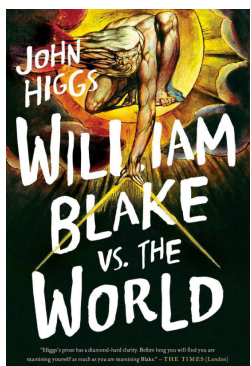
Crazy Brave: A Memoir – Joy Harjo

decided to read this first memoir by Joy Harjo, the 23rd United States Poet Laureate, who is from the Muscogee Creek Nation, as she will be our special guest in Jackson, Wyoming in June 2023 as part of the associated programming around our GROUNDED exhibition when it is there. I couldn’t put this book down. Reading it was a transcendent experience. Beautifully written, Harjo shares about her upbringing in poetic language. It is a moving story of how spirituality and creatively not only can survive, but can deepen, in the midst of great personal, communal and tribal hardship. The book ends when poetry comes to her rescue. This is a deeply moving book, and I can’t wait to read her subsequent memoir titled *Poet Warrior*.



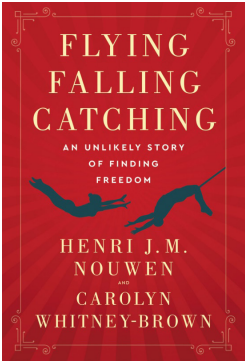
Leadership: Six Studies in World Strategy – Henry Kissinger

This the latest book by the distinguished diplomat, statesman and former Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger – written at the remarkable age of 99! It is a fascinating book in which he examines the leadership strategies of six post WWII 20th century figures - Konrad Adenauer in reconstruction Germany, Charles de Gaulle both during and after WWII, Richard Nixon in the context of the changing world scene, Anwar Sadat of Egypt in making peace with Israel, Lee Kuan Yew and the building of Singapore, and Margaret Thatcher in a changing UK. Kissinger had direct interaction with each of these figures, and he shares his personal views on how these leaders guided their people through challenging times to achieve important objectives that could not be reached without conviction and dynamism. Kissinger’s reflective contextual analysis of these five leaders is most compellingly and insightful.



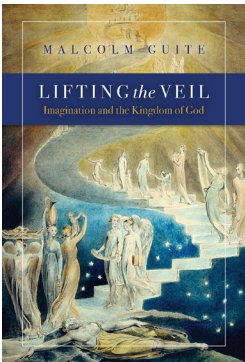
William Blake vs. the World – John Higgs

Reading this book about one of my favorite poets, the spiritual mystic and artist William Blake (1757-1827), was an adventure. Blake was one of the most imaginative artists and poets ever, and John Higgs is a magnificent guide, taking the reader on an enthralling exploration of Blake’s fascinating life, poetry and art, as well as the world in which he struggled. This is so much more than a biography, as Higgs brilliantly relates the issues and challenges of Blake’s day to our own. The book becomes a guide for benefiting from Blake’s insights and experiences to enhance our own lives and better our world, making Blake more relevant than even in his own day. This book blew me away!



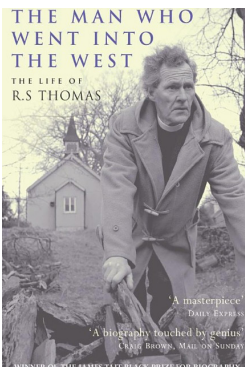
Flying, Falling, Catching: An Unlikely Story of Finding Freedom – Henri J. M. Nouwen and Carolyn Whitney-Brown

Ever since hearing Fr. Henri Nouwen speak in 1995, the year before he died, I have read almost everything he wrote. He is one of the most profound spiritual writers of the 20th century. This new book defies categorization. Creative non-fiction would best describe it, as it is based on the last manuscript Nouwen wrote, left unfinished at his death in 1996. During the last five years of Nouwen's life, he established a transformative friendship with The Flying Rodleights, a traveling trapeze troupe, and he thought his book about his experience with them would become his most important book. Carolyn Whitney-Brown, Nouwen's colleague and friend, eloquently shares about the circumstances of his life around his unpublished trapeze writings. This book drew me into Nouwen's life and touched me deeply.



Lifting the Veil: Imagination and the Kingdom of God – Malcolm Guite

This slim volume of 111 pages is written by one of the most interesting people alive, Malcolm Guite - Church of England priest, poet, singer-songwriter, scholar, pipe aficionado, and who even more interestingly looks very much like a Hobbit. If you have not read Malcolm Guite's books or poetry before, this beautiful little book is an excellent place to begin. "Lifting the Veil" began as three lectures that Guite gave at Regent College in Vancouver, B.C. It is in essence an illustrative celebration of the imagination in the Christian life. Full of illustrations, and poetry, it is a call to engage with material that will spark our spiritual imaginations, challenging us to examine what we fill our minds with that influence the creative, spiritual centers within us. Through this lovely book Guite succeeds in his objective, which he shares at the end: "I hope I have made the case for an imaginative grasp of faith and an imaginative proclamation of the faith, and most of all for a glad recognition that in Christ, our imagination, in all its modes and forms, is baptized and renewed." I have never read a book that so clearly articulates the relationship between Christianity and poetry, creativity, meaning, the arts, and the imagination. I can't recommend it highly enough.



The Man Who Went Into the West: The Life of R.S. Thomas – Byron Rogers

The University of Edinburgh awarded Byron Roger, the author of this magnificent book on one of my favorite poets, the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for the best biography published during the year it was released. About *The Man Who Went Into the West: The Life of RS Thomas*, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, said: "Byron Rogers's lively and affectionate biography is unexpectedly, even riotously funny." Rogers, once the speechwriter for Prince Charles of Wales (now King Charles III), shares a fascinating and at times heartbreaking account of the life of R.S. Thomas, the Welsh poet and Anglican priest, who was a finalist for the Nobel Prize for Literature. A man of spiritual depth, but with many failings, his eloquently profound poetry has served as an oasis of faith for many.