



Lit!: A Christian Guide to Reading Books

Tony Reinke , C.J. Mahaney (Foreword)

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Whether books are your addiction or your phobia, Lit! offers up solid advice to help you think about reading in fresh ways.

With all the practical suggestions built on a firm gospel foundation, this book will help you flourish in the essential skills necessary for a balanced reading diet of Scripture, serious works of theology, and moving devotional works, but without overlooking the importance of how-to books from expert practitioners, the storytelling genius of historians, and rich novels written by skilled artists of fiction.

Literature scholar Leland Ryken calls Lit! “a triumph of scholarship,” but mostly it’s a practical and unpretentious book about the most urgent skills you need to enjoy a luminously literate life in honor of God.

Lit!: A Christian Guide to Reading Books Details

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From Reader Review Lit!: A Christian Guide to Reading Books for online ebook

Adam Ross says

I was very much looking forward to this book when I opened it and began reading. Perhaps it would have been better if I hadn't. Disappointment after high hopes and expectations is much like plunging from a great height without a parachute when you're deathly afraid of flying and there's no pile of straw to cushion the blow when you finally hit the ground.

All that to say, I have endeavored to be as fair as possible to the book, though this difficulty is compounded by the incoherence of the argumentation, the shallow level of insight, and the poverty of prose and aesthetic vision. Even more frustrating is the book's endorsement by prominent evangelicals who ought to know better, like Leland Ryken, J. I. Packer, Randy Alcorn, Russell Moore, Tim Challies, song-writer/novelist Andrew Peterson. It only goes to prove that evangelicals are still so far from entering even the shallows of a proper approach to literature, because I can tell you right now, this book does not have it.

Contradictions

Easily the biggest problem I had with the book was the level of incoherence it displays, often making a point and then reversing it in later chapters. As an example, take the claim that visual communication is both dangerous (p. 39-42) and acceptable (43). Reading for propositional content is bad (103, 122) and the proper method by which Christians ought to read (63). Searching for morals in fiction is good (170) and bad (122). Non-Christian fiction reveals the glory of God (75-77, 120), and rarely is non-Christian fiction acceptable (105). In fact, you should both read (65-67) and avoid non-Christian fiction (78).

It is clear the Reinke has not fully divested himself of typical evangelical approaches to fiction, though he occasionally rails against the very tendencies he assumes. That is fine, but I do wonder why exactly he wrote a book on a subject he is so radically two-minded about. The book is now "out there" and will cause Christians no end of confusion over literature.

Arguments

The first part of Lit is supposedly a "doctrine of reading," which I assume is different from a doctrine of literature, though he nowhere makes this important distinction. To actually correct the major problems with this part of the book would take its own book, so I will content myself with a few specific examples which illustrate the enormous confusions to which Reinke and other evangelical Christians hold about literature.

The first two chapters mostly just run through the Exodus story and various doctrines of Scripture, an odd tactic for a book on literature and which opens the book with an emphasis on propositions, a mistake that compounds itself in repeatedly larger ways as we go.

Chapter three is the most problematic of the first part of the book, attacking our "image-based" culture in favor of older word-only forms of communication typical years ago. Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death* has become something of a darling in evangelical circles, despite the obvious problems of Postman's formulations when compared to the fundamental doctrines of creation and Trinity, and Reinke is no slacker in his credulous acceptance of Postman, whose ideas form the backbone of the argument in Lit both here and in ch. 10.

The argument is essentially that word-based communication is superior to image-based communication, despite a few attempts to temper this conclusion (I guess images aren't all bad) by asserting that images work best when they act as word-communication's seldom-seen sidekick (pp. 44-45). In this way, Reinke falls into simplistic and stereotypical thinking about both books and visual forms of entertainment, that movies are "just entertainment" which are "passive and easy" compared with the "gradual unveiling of literary treasure," (40). Such a prejudicial start is not promising for a reasonable discussion of the merits between the word/image divide, and sure enough, we never get a discussion, reasoned or otherwise. In fact, images are just plain evil; this "word/image tension is a battle for our hearts"; the whole of the OT was "God's struggled to lead a language-centered people through the allurements of an image-dominated world," (43) and in making the Golden Calf Isreal centered their focus on images, not on the Word (42). A culture that "expresses itself in images cannot know God accurately," (42).

The problems with all of this is staggeringly manifold. First, it ignores the fact that visual communication can actually be just as challenging to the mind as a word-oriented media. Second, it ignores that all language is spatial, that is, it requires a literal concrete images of reality to remember and comprehend language; all metaphor, poetry, fiction, etc., depend on visual imagery in the mind. The Jesuits were famous for their memorization techniques, which was dependent upon a visual mental image of a house, with different genres of book associated with different rooms in the house and each text memorized depicted in the mind by concrete items in each room.

More importantly, however, it fails to correctly understand what the Word of God is. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word is the very image of God (Heb. 1:13). Word and image are co-equal and co-ultimate in the Person of Christ. Far from being a word-centered God, Yahweh frees Israel from Egypt with ten visual plagues, then leads them through the wilderness with a visual pillar of cloud and flame. The temple and tabernacle were built according to the pattern (the type, or image) revealed to Moses of the highest heavens: "Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it," (Ex. 25:9). The very words revealing and revelation imply a showing, a visual display. The sacrificial system had no words; most of the rituals were displayed in silence, being visible act of redemption and salvation. Do a study of the words "see," "seeing" and "saw" in the Fourth Gospel to see (no pun intended) how often the visual component is included, an idea continued in Revelation when John turns and "sees the voice" of Christ (Rev. 1:12)

What's the point of rehearsing all of this? Reinke is content to emphasize the dangers of visual media but ignores the obvious dangers of reading. One of the benefits of visual/aural communication is that it bring community-oriented participation. We can all watch and hear the same things altogether, all at once. Visual/aural communication builds community. Reading is an isolating act, emphasizing the individual. It is no wonder that western culture, dominated since Plato by the written word, is plagued by the scourge of radical individualism. Reading creates division, not community-development, because it emphasizes the isolated judgment of the individual. This doesn't mean reading is bad, but it does mean that demanding a word-centered culture is as unhealthy as an image-dominated one. Christ is both Word and Image united together, co-ultimate in His person. We have to find a way to develop a theology and philosophy of this.

With his domination of all things by written communication, Reinke logically moves to the assertion that language makes "worldview thinking" possible. This is true; Word-dominated subcultures develop hyper-propositional thinking typical of Enlightenment and modernist (reductionist) concepts of human thought. "One thousand images stitched together may reveal a panoramic landscape, but they cannot capture a worldview," (46-47). Such an idea betrays a profound reductionism that asserts meaning cannot be revealed outside of propositional communication. Symbolism, metaphor, fiction, all of it perishes on this assumption. The tremendously shallow thinking that leads Reinke here is frustrating, since the worldview God gives us is

revealed predominately by symbolism, visual imagery of the spatial imagination, words and sounds in the liturgical drama of worship. Christianity is not a set of propositions like other religions, but a participatory act of worship that teaches by the co-ultimate combination of visual, verbal, and aural media that are represented by the Word, Christ.

This emphasis on propositional doctrine leads him to collapse the purpose of fiction to instruction about Christ, something that will result in the death of fiction. He writes that a section of one of his favorite books “makes me stop and meditate on the eternal significance of this life,” and recommends the Narnia series because it is “filled with allegorical pictures of our savior and his sacrifice,” seeming pleased that “much of the theological symbolism sits on the surface of the books,” (98). Yet, mysteriously, he fails to see how this is in direct contradiction to other statements like this one: “Readers misread fiction when they expect to learn propositions,” (122).

I have trouble recommending the book for the fundamental confusion it has over the nature and theology of the arts, of literature, and of visual media also. The practical side of the book on highlighting and methods of reading, on the other hand, may be of help to the Christian new to reading as a life-long habit.

<http://atrossbooks.com/2012/02/14/boo...>

Neil Coulter says

I am not the target audience for Lit, and so my opinion of the book doesn't count for much. All throughout the book, Tony Reinke is clear that he is writing to people who don't enjoy reading books (and it strikes me that writing a book to encourage non-readers to read more books is kind of a strange idea). I, on the other hand, can never read enough books, and it's hard for me even to imagine not wanting to read all the time. The main challenge I took from Reinke's book is to spend more time meditating on what I'm reading, rejecting the temptation to simply acquire more titles in my “Read” list. That's a good encouragement for me, because I'm a collector at heart, and I do love the satisfying feeling of having completed a book. I need to consider how well I remember the books I read, and what effect they are having on how I think and live my life.

I'd have a hard time recommending Lit to anyone, simply because there are other books on the same topic that are much better. Reinke himself admits that “nearly everything I have learned about reading literature from a Christian perspective has come from the pen of [Leland] Ryken” (127), and I see no reason to read Reinke instead of going directly to Ryken. (I studied literature with Ryken at Wheaton College and had the pleasure of reading most of his books while in his classes.) I'd also recommend Alan Jacobs over Reinke, and even just regularly reading Books & Culture, which is populated almost entirely by writers who love books, is tremendously helpful in cultivating a readerly mindset.

Reinke spends more time in Lit than I think was necessary in drilling into the reader the idea that the Bible is the supreme book-above-all-other-books. I don't disagree with this, but the tone he uses sets the book up as being exclusively for conservative evangelical (Protestant) Christians, which I believe narrows the audience (and probably drives some Christians away) unnecessarily. He also seems to be more concerned with reading for the purpose of instruction and edification, almost begrudging the idea of reading stories just to be drawn into the stories. He does encourage reading for the pleasure of story itself, but his recommended reading is limited to *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. I'd like to see a Christian braving newer, more unexpected territory than that. I love Tolkien and Lewis, but everyone already knows about those books; I want Reinke to invite me into something that I haven't heard of yet. The only other fiction authors

he references repeatedly are Dostoevsky and Tolstoy—again, two of my favorites, but also two of the most famous authors ever. Most of Reinke's chapters are full of quotes from Lewis, Ryken, John Piper, Charles Spurgeon, and some occasional Flannery O'Connor. When I read a book about reading books, I want to trust that the author has explored places I haven't been yet; I didn't have that confidence in Reinke, so his exhortations had little power. And it's not helpful that Reinke's writing style is merely passable, but not excellent; it feels like college student-level writing to me, with frequent imprecisions (such as misuse of “is comprised of,” or using “verbally” when he means “orally”; little details, but in a book about reading, I need to be able to respect the writer). Another small annoyance is Reinke's constant use of numbered lists of this or that. In reading *Lit*, the reader will have to work his or her way through:

- **Four ways
- **Seven benefits
- **Six priorities
- **Twenty tips and tricks
- **Six ways
- **Four temptations
- **Ten reasons
- **Three goals
- **Two groups
- **Five marks

A little bit of that kind of structure goes a long way for me.

As a minor side note: I find it odd that a book about reading has neither index nor bibliography, nor even a list of recommended further reading.

The topic of *Lit* is an interesting one, and one that I generally enjoy reading and thinking about. Unfortunately, Reinke has nothing new to add to the conversation. I'm grateful for all of the better books in this area that are already available.

Douglas Wilson says

A very fine book on the theology and mechanics of reading.

Jeremy says

Alissa Wilkinson's review is [here](#), where she also reviews Alan Jacobs's *The Pleasures of Reading*. Video interview with JT [here](#).

Megan Larson says

I love to read (sometimes). I love books (too much?). I love lists of books (way too much). When maturity reigns, I love wisdom, truth, and beauty from books. Tony Reinke's *Lit!* is a thoughtful, helpful, challenging book about why, how, and how much a Christian should read.

It is thoughtful because, before delving into the "how-to" of being a good reader, he addresses the theology of reading for Christians. I felt these first six chapters actually could have used a bit more editing for conciseness, but nevertheless his points are crucial if our reading is to be communion with God and not simply an intellectual or aesthetic exercise. Be patient, and don't skip this part. It fleshes out the supremacy of Scripture, the need for Gospel lenses in reading, why words trump images in communication, what makes a biblical worldview and how to interpret other worldviews, the value of, and standards for choosing non-Christian literature, and the necessity of imaginative literature for the Christian.

Part two is called "Some Practical Advice on Book Reading." I was challenged to make concrete priorities to guide the books I choose (so simple, but I hadn't formally done it), and to ask questions before reading that I expected to be answered. I was granted permission to stop reading a book that didn't answer the questions (shocking!) or to read isolated sections of non-fiction books that are pertinent without feeling pressured to finish the whole thing (what?). When to read fast, when to read slow, the value of fiction, why and how to scribble in the margins without getting bogged down, how to guard my reading time and make sure deep contemplation is not destroyed by internet habits (ouch!), and how to come away with the nuggets I'll go back to again and again. I also came away with a whole list of other books to read (one of my favorite things).

The dust is still settling from my reading of this book, and I'm challenging myself as a seeker of wisdom not to bounce on to the next thing (more Reinke advice), but I am ready to take away a couple more nuggets now: as I have mulled over this book in Kindle format, attempting to read it as I would prefer to do, marking and writing, flipping back and forth, going over notes and highlighted sections, I wanted to throw the Kindle across the room. The codex prevails for deep reading! (Then again, I think I got this book free on Kindle.) But perhaps my take-away is that, if a book is good enough to motivate me to do that, it's good enough to buy a hard copy. Also, and most importantly, I was reminded that Christian reading, just like Christian everything-else, is for God's glory and should be purposeful. I'm thankful for all of these challenges and genuinely feel better equipped to read "Christianly."

Josiphine/Tessa says

I am not really the target audience for this book because I already love reading (and always have) and this book is geared towards the reluctant adult reader. Reinke spends a lot of time discussing why we should be reading. I still gained some insights from this book. In particular, I loved the annual reading schedule in chapter fifteen, and the focus on reading deeply rather than just widely.

Ashley says

A terrific book to get you reflecting about what you read and why you read it. How does our identity in Christ transform our book choices? How does it affect our world view and our mindset while reading books with differing world views? This book also includes practical advice about how to read non-fiction and fiction, how to write in your books (gasp!), and how to share books/reading/knowledge with others! Loved the author's insights and his liberal inclusion of other author's quotes on reading.

Kris says

A very broad overview, meant for a very young reader. At first I thought he meant this to be for students in

high school or junior high. The first half felt very simplistic, but then the second half gives obvious advice to parents and pastors. There was nothing new in here for me, I think because I am just not the target audience.

Side bar:

Reinke makes a good point in saying that a Christian, especially a young one, should delay reading certain books because they don't have the spiritual maturity or grounded worldview to handle it. I wish more Christians understood that many secular books shouldn't be banned, but simply delayed -- talked about and analyzed and criticized in a healthy way, when ready.

Quotes:

“When necessary, Calvin roasted Plato for his errors and for his overall theological blindness. But where Plato was right, Plato was useful. And where Plato was useful, Calvin was free to benefit from his teaching and to use that teaching to illustrate biblical truth.”

“To view imaginative literature as a genre fit only for the amusement of children is an act of spiritual negligence.... The lesson I have learned is that a failure to cultivate the imagination leads to an unintended neglect of the imaginative literature of Scripture, and this in turn leads to some degree of spiritual atrophy.”

Leonardo Bruno says

O livro é dividido em duas partes. Na primeira, que é uma espécie de teologia dos livros, o autor deixa bem claro que, apesar de todo o valor da literatura humana (cristã ou não-cristã), a Escritura é o nosso livro mais fundamental, pelo qual avaliamos todos os outros. Na segunda parte, mais prática, o autor fornece dicas de como ler melhor, como encontrar tempo para ler, como influenciar os filhos e membros da igreja à leitura e muito mais. No último capítulo ele elenca cinco características de um leitor saudável, quais sejam: 1) estimar a sabedoria; 2) apreciar livros antigos; 3) manter a literatura em seu lugar; 4) evitar transformar os livros em ídolos; e 5) manter-se apegado ao Salvador.

Ou seja, um ótimo livro, sobre um ótimo tema, e ainda mais especial para mim porque foi o primeiro livro em inglês que consegui concluir! Acho que foi a leitura mais proveitosa que fiz em 2015.

Altamente recomendado!

Alan Alexandrino says

Excelente livro! Este ano está difícil, pois pelo visto terei de fazer um Top 20!

Falando do livro em si, Tony Reinke o divide em duas partes. A primeira é uma espécie de "teologia da leitura de livros", onde ele estabelece o princípio de que devemos ler todo tipo de literatura, incluindo a produzida por não cristãos, mas tendo sempre a Escritura como a pedra de toque de tudo o que lemos. Na segunda parte ele oferece sugestões, dicas práticas acerca de como ler melhor, como fazer anotações e marcações nos livros, como desenvolver o gosto pela leitura em nossos filhos e nos membros das nossas igrejas.

Recomendo fortemente!

CJ Bowen says

A helpful intro to book-reading. I'd find this most useful to give to high schoolers just embarking on a mature reading life. Where Veith (*Reading Between the Lines*) focuses more on what gets read, Reinke focuses more on the activity of reading. Both are good; a book that combined their strengths, included a reading list, and avoided the imagophobia and internet-bashing would quickly displace both of them as my go to book. But for now, Reinke's book is quite serviceable.

Reading Notes:

Chapter 2: Not at all happy with the cliched "word vs. image" battle. God gives us both, and they shed light on each other. Word became flesh. But Reinke is far from alone in his characterization.

Page 73: point 6 - non-christian literature does not "beg" questions; it raises them, or asks them, or prompts them. I'll take anything other than beg. Pet peeve.

Random specification: Specific tangents that eat up several paragraphs abound - women should read theology, pastors shouldn't abuse business books, etc. While often helpful, these applications are very random - who is the book written for? Why was this specific group chosen to receive pointed application at this time, while dozens of other groups are left to make their own applications? I have no idea.

Page 122: "Don't read fiction with the hope that it will shape your worldview." What? How can it not? Reinke rightly points out you shouldn't look for a thesis or propositions in fiction, but a thesis and propositions are hardly the only shapers of worldview. I'm tempted to argue that good fiction has a stronger shaping influence on the heart and emotions than non-fiction. I think what Reinke means to argue is that you shouldn't allow the emotive elements of fiction to cause you overthrow the cognitive truths more propositionally presented in non-fiction. But fiction cannot be reduced to a giant fallacious appeal to emotion. Fiction has the ability to highlight and poke holes in bad propositional beliefs, and following Reinke on this point would handcuff us for no good reason. Arguing as Reinke does that "Scripture alone should inform our worldview" is an abuse of *sola scriptura*, not a well-informed use of it. Scripture is the supreme written norm for our worldview, but hardly the only source that influences or shapes it. This pgh. meant well, but was very poorly articulated.

Chapter 12: Marginalia - I'm one of those people who doesn't write in books, and I don't plan to start. I do keep commonplaces, and I do engage with books in other places, I just don't mark up my books. I find marginalia to be a hindrance in re-reading and in borrowing; maybe I treat my own library like a library. Underline or highlight me unconvinced.

Chapter 13: Reading Together - Really, really liked this chapter. What Reinke describes is more than a book club, because it is more about the people than about the books. People growing together around good books. I want that to describe most of my life.

Dillon says

This book had some good things to say! A good primer on why Christians ought to read books. I was a little disappointed that he didn't mention Goodreads though ;)

Takeaways:

- fiction can be instructional, even more so than nonfiction, given the right book.
 - the goal of reading isn't just to read a lot. Read to understand.
 - read to love Christ. Whatever else you're reading, always be reading the Bible too and preferably some Christian literature. These help to inform whatever else you read.
 - read to understand the way the world works. Don't shy away from reading something only because it's dark.
 - read as slowly as you need to read.
 - it's okay to quit books. A lot of books are longer than they need to be. Also, a lot of books are just bad.
 - it's okay and probably even helpful to read more than one book at a time. I've definitely found this to be the case - when I'm bored of one book, I pick up another. It's like CrossFit, but with books.
 - classics are classics for a reason - they've withstood the test of time. Newly published works cannot have withstood this test.
 - be discerning when choosing what to read. There's not enough time in life to read all the books you might find interesting. Use Goodreads. I added that last part.
-

Megan says

I read Lit! immediately after reading Alan Jacobs's *The Pleasures of Reading in an Age of Distraction*, and in many ways Lit! is the knock-off version of Jacobs's elegant work: fulfilling much the same purposes, but with lesser quality, especially given Reinke's facile theology of reading and inelegant writing style.

Yes, there are good suggestions in Lit! as to how to read more, much like there are in *The Pleasures of Reading in an Age of Distraction*. Some that I found especially useful were the reminder that reading takes discipline, the subordination of the lazy flesh; the encouragement to have more than one book going at a time, which works well for me as I can switch between fiction and nonfiction depending on my mood and the time of day; the instructions on starting a reading group or a book club (I love book clubs!); and the instruction on how to mark books up. I may give the chapter on why fiction is valuable or the one on how to mark books up to my Intro to Literature students as an extra credit project.

That said, to use an analogy which Reinke himself employs, while there are gold nuggets in his instructions on reading, the book overall is dross.

This is largely due to the superficial theology which Reinke lays out as a frame for reading, a theology drawn directly from conservative evangelicalism; thus, blame for the weak-minded and erroneous approach to reading must be shared between Reinke and evangelical culture. Reinke assumes that the primary purpose of reading is instruction, and that worthwhile instruction comes mainly, if not wholly, from texts which share our worldview.

Reinke assumes that reading is for learning. Do we learn from reading, develop into more godly, more compassionate people through the reading of novels and poetry and nonfiction texts? Yes, of course. But I find Reinke's emphasis on instruction as the purpose of reading off-putting, because it seems to miss a huge part of what makes literature worthwhile, as if one were to sit down to a delicious dinner with good friends and remark only on how the dinner fuels the body, focusing on the nutrients present rather than the delicious tastes and textures. Such a reaction would twist the whole point of the dinner, and Reinke's book does just that: When he defends the reading of fiction, he spends less time talking about how fiction is simply *fun*,

much more time talking about how it can make us into better people. He illustrates the value of imagery and literary texts by describing the imagery in Revelation - imagery, he says, which is meant to make us holy. Yes, the imagery is meant to do that, but we flatter ourselves if we think the frightening imagery in Revelation is for our spiritual benefit. It's not that at all. Could it be that the reality of Christ is so great as to make imagery and poetry the only possible way of talking about that truth? Could story and poetry simply be the only way to get across certain experiences and truths? This too Reinke misses, that literature has value outside of how it helps us. Instead, his defense of fiction and literature falls prey to the utilitarianism which pervades modern American culture.

More seriously, Reinke sharply divides good Christian literature from suspicious non-Christian literature, a category which includes books written by non-evangelicals, such as the Catholic Henri Nouwen. *Lit!* begins with an extended, several chapters long reminder of the fact that the Bible is the only source of truth. This is true, but especially given that Reinke's audience likely agrees with him on this, seems like a trite, unnecessary point, more likely to keep his readers from reading other books than encourage them to do so (After all, if you're not a big reader and if it's dangerous to read other books besides the Bible, then why bother with other books?)

And Reinke never really gets deeper than this, or more sensible. He promises a theology of reading, but what this amounts to is an overwrought caution against non-Christian literature, a category which includes books written by non-evangelicals like Catholic Henri Nouwen. Here Reinke relies heavily on an analogy of a canyon: On one side of the canyon stand Christians; on the other, separated by a lack of a true biblical worldview, are non-Christian texts. Reinke says that we can "read across the canyon", appreciating beauty and truth in non-Christian texts but recognizing the gulf between those texts and our position. This is absolutely terrible, for several reasons:

One, this analogy puts evangelicals on a pedestal, assuming that we have a firm and exclusive grip on Truth and can therefore criticize those who are not Christian, and sometimes those who are not evangelical. Yet as long as we live in a fallen world, we will not be on a kind of Truth pedestal above the rest of the world; yes, we have the guidance of the Holy Spirit and Scripture, but there is no guarantee that we follow either one correctly, or with the right attitude. Nor are non-Christians or non-evangelicals excluded from Truth; indeed, there are some cases when they seem to have a better grip on it than believers do. Even Christ says this, noting that the children of this world are savvier than the children of light, urging his audience to be more savvy (Luke 16). Thus, saying that by definition, we evangelicals have more Truth than non-evangelical literature does is absurd.

Two, and relatedly, we risk a great deal of learning if we refuse to learn from non-Christian texts. Reinke's analogy of the canyon between Christians and non-Christians makes a critical attitude towards non-Christian texts the default one, yet this is perhaps the least helpful attitude to have while reading. My students often approach non-evangelical literature with a critical attitude, and as a result, they miss out on a lot of beauty and truth; to read (say) C.S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce* in order to criticize its theology of Heaven and Hell is to miss the bigger, more worthwhile point, that we must commit to God above all our earthly loves and virtues. Is it not better to approach a text with humility, laying aside our theological platforms and assumptions in order to learn what we can from it? Yet this is not what Reinke does; his view of the canyon between Christian and non-Christian texts plays into the evangelical knee-jerk reaction to criticize anything we don't agree with.

Three, and most important, Reinke's theology of reading misunderstands how we actually learn. He urges excessive caution towards non-Christian texts, writing that we must put off reading them until we are very well grounded in our faith and altogether avoid reading which glorifies evil. This is too simple, and we will

not learn from it. Milton writes in *Areopagitica* that virtue which has not encountered opposition is but a blank virtue, not a pure one; to be really virtuous, he says, we must learn to see the difference between truth and error and to prefer that which is really good. Reinke's theology denies readers this trial, keeping them on milky truths and protecting them from the difficult things which will build up mind and soul, much the same way that hard exercise builds up muscles. Indeed, Reinke, in wanting to protect his readers from non-Christian literature, makes a fundamental misassumption about sin: that it enters us from without, rather than from within. As long as you avoid non-Christian books because you're afraid they will lead you to sin, you're vainly imagining that sin is something which contaminates us from the world, an infection which can be defended against; but it is already within us, part of us. Through Christ it has been conquered, but it is still there. Milton's view of reading, in which we read books which contain both good and evil that we may learn to prefer that which is truly good, more accurately reflects the nature of the world that we live in, in that we must train our fallen souls to follow after God despite evil, rather than shielding ourselves from evil and hoping for the best.

A few more thoughts before I close:

I said that Reinke's book was inelegant, and I mean that. At least half the chapters devolve into a listicle organization: "20 tips for reading non-fiction books" or "3 kinds of books to avoid" or "7 tips for reading to your children". Compare to the organization of Jacobs's book, in which one point raises questions or points that he addresses in the next point, and so on. Jacobs's organization is organic, with the content setting the organization; Reinke's is inorganic, with his ideal organization affecting the content, preventing him from digging as deeply as he otherwise could.

A final note is that for a book on enjoying reading, Reinke gives very few examples of books he enjoys, beyond the (stereotypical) nod to *Lord of the Rings* and *Narnia* (I enjoy these as much as anyone, but come on! Can we Christians not find *other* books besides these to publicly celebrate! Or is our library simply an endless row of *Lord of the Rings* books?) Jacobs's perpetual examples of Russian literature did not connect with me, but at least he rhapsodized about books he enjoyed and gave examples from them. Reinke quotes pastors and the occasional writer - PD James, Marilynne Robinson, as though he's writing a research paper on how to read, not as though he's sharing a love of reading with his readers.

In any case, not recommended, unless you want a better understanding of why the evangelical intellect is so impoverished.

Ben Chapman says

I absolutely loved this book. It will be a reference to me for the rest of my years. Very well done.

Randy Alcorn says

I read many books, but seldom do I enjoy one more than I did Tony Reinke's *A Christian Guide to Reading Books*. Many of my greatest childhood adventures, and much of my growth after I was converted as a teenager, came through reading imagination-expanding and life-changing books. Tony's writing is thoughtful, perceptive, concise, and God-honoring. He honors biblical authority, and offers helpful guidance, while allowing for a variety of tastes. *A Christian Guide to Reading Books* rings true to my own lifetime of

reading experience. As a reader and writer of both nonfiction and fiction, I appreciate the breadth of Tony's treatment, which includes a variety of genres. For book lovers, this is a treasure and delight. For those who aren't book lovers, it makes a great case for becoming one.
