

Women of the Church Book Group

Book List for 2021-2022

For more information, the monthly Zoom link, and to be added to the group's email list – please contact Janice Clements: janclm25@gmail.com

September 27, 2021 7:00 PM Via Zoom Diana Carlisle, facilitator

Caste : The Origins of Our Discontents by [Isabel Wilkerson](#) available hardcover, paperback, Kindle

“As we go about our daily lives, caste is the wordless usher in a darkened theater, flashlight cast down in the aisles, guiding us to our assigned seats for a performance. The hierarchy of caste is not about feelings or morality. It is about power—which groups have it and which do not.”

In this brilliant book, Isabel Wilkerson gives us a masterful portrait of an unseen phenomenon in America as she explores, through an immersive, deeply researched narrative and stories about real people, how America today and throughout its history has been shaped by a hidden caste system, a rigid hierarchy of human rankings.

Beyond race, class, or other factors, there is a powerful caste system that influences people's lives and behavior and the nation's fate. Linking the caste systems of America, India, and Nazi Germany, Wilkerson explores eight pillars that underlie caste systems across civilizations, including divine will, bloodlines, stigma, and more. Using riveting stories about people—including Martin Luther King, Jr., baseball's Satchel Paige, a single father and his toddler son, Wilkerson herself, and many others—she shows the ways that the insidious undertow of caste is experienced every day. She documents how the Nazis studied the racial systems in America to plan their out-cast of the Jews; she discusses why the cruel logic of caste requires that there be a bottom rung for those in the middle to measure themselves against; she writes about the surprising health costs of caste, in depression and life expectancy, and the effects of this hierarchy on our culture and politics. Finally, she points forward to ways America can move beyond the artificial and destructive separations of human divisions, toward hope in our common humanity.

Beautifully written, original, and revealing, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* is an eye-opening story of people and history, and a reexamination of what lies under the surface of ordinary lives and of American life today.

October 25, 2021 7:00 PM via Zoom: Donna Lee, facilitator

The Vanishing Half: A Novel Hardcover by [Brit Bennett](#) available hardcover, paperback, Kindle

The Vignes twin sisters will always be identical. But after growing up together in a small, southern black community and running away at age sixteen, it's not just the shape of their daily lives that is different as adults, it's everything: their families, their communities, their racial identities. Many years later, one sister lives with her black daughter in the same southern town she once tried to escape. The other secretly passes for white, and her white husband knows nothing of her past. Still, even separated by so many miles and just as many lies, the fates of the

twins remain intertwined. What will happen to the next generation, when their own daughters' storylines intersect?

Weaving together multiple strands and generations of this family, from the Deep South to California, from the 1950s to the 1990s, Brit Bennett produces a story that is at once a riveting, emotional family story and a brilliant exploration of the American history of passing. Looking well beyond issues of race, *The Vanishing Half* considers the lasting influence of the past as it shapes a person's decisions, desires, and expectations, and explores some of the multiple reasons and realms in which people sometimes feel pulled to live as something other than their origins.

As with her *New York Times*-bestselling debut *The Mothers*, Brit Bennett offers an engrossing page-turner about family and relationships that is immersive and provocative, compassionate and wise.

November 22, 2021 7:00 PM Via Zoom: Linda Elrick, facilitator

One Long River of Song: Notes on Wonder by [Brian Doyle](#) (Author), [David James Duncan](#) (Introduction) Available hardcover, paperback, Kindle

When Brian Doyle passed away at the age of sixty after a bout with brain cancer, he left behind a cult-like following of devoted readers who regard his writing as one of the best-kept secrets of the twenty-first century. Doyle writes with a delightful sense of wonder about the sanctity of everyday things, and about love and connection in all their forms: spiritual love, brotherly love, romantic love, and even the love of a nine-foot sturgeon.

At a moment when the world can sometimes feel darker than ever, Doyle's writing, which constantly evokes the humor and even bliss that life affords, is a balm. His essays manage to find, again and again, exquisite beauty in the quotidian, whether it's the awe of a child the first time she hears a river, or a husband's whiskers that a grieving widow misses seeing in her sink every morning. Through Doyle's eyes, nothing is dull.

David James Duncan sums up Doyle's sensibilities best in his introduction to the collection: "Brian Doyle lived the pleasure of bearing daily witness to quiet glories hidden in people, places and creatures of little or no size, renown, or commercial value, and he brought inimitably playful or soaring or aching or heartfelt language to his tellings." A life's work, *One Long River of Song* invites readers to experience joy and wonder in ordinary moments that become, under Doyle's rapturous and exuberant gaze, extraordinary.

January 24, 2022 7:00 PM Via Zoom: Penny Rieley, facilitator

The Book of Longings: A Novel by [Sue Monk Kidd](#) available hardcover, paperback, Kindle

In her mesmerizing fourth work of fiction, Sue Monk Kidd takes an audacious approach to history and brings her acclaimed narrative gifts to imagine the story of a young woman named Ana. Raised in a wealthy family with ties to the ruler of Galilee, she is rebellious and ambitious, with a brilliant mind and a daring spirit. She engages in furtive scholarly pursuits and writes narratives about neglected and silenced women. Ana is expected to marry an older widower, a prospect that horrifies her. An encounter with eighteen-year-old Jesus changes everything.

Their marriage evolves with love and conflict, humor and pathos in Nazareth, where Ana makes a home with Jesus, his brothers, and their mother, Mary. Ana's pent-up longings intensify amid the turbulent resistance to Rome's occupation of Israel, partially led by her brother, Judas. She is sustained by her fearless aunt Yaltha, who harbors a compelling secret. When Ana commits a brazen act that puts her in peril, she flees to Alexandria, where startling revelations and greater dangers unfold, and she finds refuge in unexpected surroundings. Ana determines her fate during a stunning convergence of events considered among the most impactful in human history.

Grounded in meticulous research and written with a reverential approach to Jesus's life that focuses on his humanity, *The Book of Longings* is an inspiring, unforgettable account of one woman's bold struggle to realize the passion and potential inside her, while living in a time, place and culture devised to silence her. It is a triumph of storytelling both timely and timeless, from a masterful writer at the height of her powers.

February 21, 2022 7:00 PM via Zoom: Nancy McClellan, facilitator

Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants – August 11, 2015 by [Robin Wall Kimmerer](#) available Hardcover, paperback, Kindle

Drawing on her life as an indigenous scientist, and as a woman, Kimmerer shows how other living beings—asters and goldenrod, strawberries and squash, salamanders, algae, and sweetgrass—offer us gifts and lessons, even if we've forgotten how to hear their voices. In reflections that range from the creation of Turtle Island to the forces that threaten its flourishing today, she circles toward a central argument: that the awakening of ecological consciousness requires the acknowledgment and celebration of our reciprocal relationship with the rest of the living world. For only when we can hear the languages of other beings will we be capable of understanding the generosity of the earth, and learn to give our own gifts in return.

March 28, 2022 7:00 PM via Zoom: Ann Vivian, facilitator

The Rose Code: A Novel by [Kate Quinn](#) available hardcover, paperback and Kindle

1940. As England prepares to fight the Nazis, three very different women answer the call to mysterious country estate Bletchley Park, where the best minds in Britain train to break German military codes. Vivacious debutante Osla is the girl who has everything—beauty, wealth, and the dashing Prince Philip of Greece sending her roses—but she burns to prove herself as more than a society girl, and puts her fluent German to use as a translator of decoded enemy secrets. Imperious self-made Mab, product of east-end London poverty, works the legendary codebreaking machines as she conceals old wounds and looks for a socially advantageous husband. Both Osla and Mab are quick to see the potential in local village spinster Beth, whose shyness conceals a brilliant facility with puzzles, and soon Beth spreads her wings as one of the Park's few female cryptanalysts. But war, loss, and the impossible pressure of secrecy will tear the three apart.

1947. As the royal wedding of Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip whips post-war Britain into a fever, three friends-turned-enemies are reunited by a mysterious encrypted letter--the key to which lies buried in the long-ago betrayal that destroyed their friendship and left one of them confined to an asylum. A mysterious traitor has emerged from the shadows of their Bletchley Park past, and now Osla, Mab, and Beth must resurrect their old alliance and crack one last code

together. But each petal they remove from the rose code brings danger--and their true enemy--closer...

April 25, 2022 7:00 PM via Zoom: Janice Clements, facilitator

Mink River by [Brian Doyle](#) available paperback, MP3 CD, Kindle

Like Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood* and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, Brian Doyle's stunning fiction debut brings a town to life through the jumbled lives and braided stories of its people.

In a small fictional town on the Oregon coast there are love affairs and almost-love-affairs, mystery and hilarity, bears and tears, brawls and boats, a garrulous logger and a silent doctor, rain and pain, Irish immigrants and Salish stories, mud and laughter. There's a Department of Public Works that gives haircuts and counts insects, a policeman addicted to Puccini, a philosophizing crow, beer and berries. An expedition is mounted, a crime committed, and there's an unbelievably huge picnic on the football field. Babies are born. A car is cut in half with a saw. A river confesses what it's thinking. . .

It's the tale of a town, written in a distinct and lyrical voice, and readers will close the book more than a little sad to leave the village of Neawanaka, on the wet coast of Oregon, beneath the hills that used to boast the biggest trees in the history of the world.

May 23, 2022 7:00 PM via Zoom: Lou Daniel Rochford, Facilitator *consider inviting Adult Ed/wider audience for discussion***

Freeing Jesus: Rediscovering Jesus as Friend, Teacher, Savior, Lord, Way, and Presence by [Diana Butler Bass](#) available hardcover, paperback, Kindle

How can you still be a Christian? This is the most common question Diana Butler Bass is asked today. It is a question that many believers ponder as they wrestle with disappointment and disillusionment in their church and its leadership. But while many Christians have left their churches, they cannot leave their faith behind.

In *Freeing Jesus*, Bass challenges the idea that Jesus can only be understood in static, one-dimensional ways and asks us to instead consider a life where Jesus grows with us and helps us through life's challenges in several capacities: as Friend, Teacher, Savior, Lord, Way, and Presence.

Freeing Jesus is an invitation to leave the religious wars behind and rediscover Jesus in all his many manifestations, to experience Jesus beyond the narrow confines we have built around him. It renews our hope in faith and worship at a time when we need it most.