

## The Essential Seminary Reading List

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The texts today's seminarians are reading.

**Samuel Ogles**

“I’ve definitely seen more people reading the more practical authors’ work,” reports Dr. Bill Donahue, associate professor of pastoral theology at [Trinity Evangelical Divinity School](#). Donahue says responding to the issues of the moment is an ongoing, not to mention valuable, trend at seminaries today. In the Christian culture of the 1980s and ’90s, there was an emphasis on group life, which resulted in Donahue being asked to design a master’s level subtrack on small groups. “Spiritual formation” became a hot topic in the 1990s, so books and courses were tailored around that. Later, the focus was on being “missional” and on the “gospel.” Today, Donahue says “leadership” and “sexuality” are hot topics, and both publishers and graduate courses reflect this.

What should prospective students read?

While everyone’s path to enrolling in a Christian graduate program is different, most professors have recommendations for what students should read before

experts.

**Gary Black:** Fortress Press has a series [of books] coming out called Foundations for Learning. I highly recommend [them]. These are seminary professors writing to say, *This is what you should expect in a graduate program*. And a lot of professors will probably use these books in a first class that seminarians take.

**Gary Bredfeldt** (vice president of strategic initiatives and dean of Capital Seminary and Graduate School): Nancy Pearcey's *Total Truth* is an outstanding book for any believer to read. And if you're going to go to seminary, you've got to be thinking the way Pearcey describes. If there's one book I would recommend, it would be this one.

**Bill Donahue:** I want prospective students reading leader- and character-formation books because that's the biggest challenge. Lance Witt's *Replenish* is very good. It's simple and small, and it's just on themes and topics. *Resilient Ministry* by Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie is another. It's the result of a study, and they landed on five things you just have to get right if you want a long-term ministry. The hardest thing for students to do is to keep their spiritual life while in graduate school.

**Tim Gombis:** Christopher Wright's *The Mission of God* is the perfect book to digest in anticipation of seminary, just to get the big picture of what the Bible is all about and what impulses are running through the Christian story.

**Richard Steele** (professor of moral and historical theology and associate dean of graduate theological studies at [Seattle Pacific University](#)): [I recommend] *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* by David Bentley Hart. Hart is not an easy read. In this particular case, what Hart has done is take on the so-called New Atheists. I think it's fair to say "faith" is problematic to many students. They're high on Jesus, but they're a little bit



Samuel Ogles is a writer living in Wheaton, Illinois. He is a student of contemplation and blogs about ecumenical Christian spirituality at samuelogles.com. You can follow him on Twitter@samuelogles.

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