

Book report

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [September 6, 2011](#) issue



Image by Flickr user [ginnerobot](#), licensed under [Creative Commons](#).

Almost but not quite as wonderful as a week at the ocean with 11 grandchildren is the day they all depart, leaving us suddenly alone. Then serious reading begins.

In his bestselling book *In the Garden of Beasts: Love, Terror, and an American Family in Hitler's Berlin*, Erik Larson tells the story of William Dodd, a University of Chicago professor who was the first U.S. ambassador to Germany after the Nazis had seized power. His experiences provide intriguing insights into the puzzle of how a cultured, well-educated nation spawned a demonic fascist dictatorship.

In the context of the arrogant self-certainty of some in the evangelical community and the dry rationalism of the new atheists, I've found two resources for inquiring people who want to know what Christians really believe: *Why Jesus Matters*, by George W. Stroup, a professor of theology, and *The Other Jesus: Rejecting a Religion of Fear for the God of Love*, by Greg Garrett, novelist, professor of English and a licensed lay preacher.

In thinking about how to observe the tenth anniversary of the September 11 attacks, I discovered a couple of thoughtful books. In *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*, Serene Jones, president of Union Theological Seminary in New York City, explores work being done in the area of trauma studies, from the devastating impact of domestic violence to her own experience of loss, trauma and grief. Two faith claims are the foundation of the book: "We live in a world profoundly broken by violence" and "God loves this world and desires that suffering be met by hope, love and grace." In "9/11's Emmaus, Gracing the Disordered Theological Imagination," Jones suggests that disciples on the road to Emmaus did not recognize Jesus because they were caught in the feedback loop of the violence they had witnessed in the crucifixion.

The essays in Walter Brueggemann's *Truth-Telling as Subversive Obedience* first appeared in *Journal for Preachers*. As always, Brueggemann is strong, spirited and grounded in the presence of Yahweh in the world. I especially liked "The Proclamation of Resurrection in the Old Testament" and "Truth-Telling Comfort" (written on September 12, 2001). Both books will help as our church collaborates in planning an interfaith service of remembrance and reflection.