

SERIOUS TIMES

MAKING YOUR LIFE MATTER IN AN URGENT DAY

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Summer Reading

Ten new (or at least relatively new) titles that won't take you all summer to read (under 350 pages each). And, as last year, these are offered in no particular order.

The Good Life by Charles Colson. It's no secret that Chuck is a friend, and we share many affinities as we think about life and culture. Unfortunately, some have been put off by some of Chuck's writings due to its length and/or depth (e.g., *How Then Should We Live?*, which more people may own than have actually read). All the more reason to celebrate *The Good Life*, which is one of the more accessible books Colson has written since his classic *Loving God*.

The Lighthouse by P.D. James. Well into her eighties, one never knows which will be the last P.D. James novel featuring her famed sleuth, Adam Dalgleish. Many critics are calling this installment her best to date, and I would join them (my favorite continues to be *Holy Orders*, but mostly for its theological sub-plot beneath the murder mystery, akin to Umberto Eco's *The Naming of the Rose*).

Letters to a Young Catholic by George Weigel. Second year in a row for a Weigel book. Yes, he is certainly one of my favorite authors, and generally overlooked by Protestant readers. In my neighborhood bookstore, he is not even grouped with mainstream Christian titles, but with "Catholic" interests. Weigel tutors a young Catholic by taking him/her to various sites key to the Christian faith, and through that "place" mentors on the meaning of faith itself.

The Narnian by Alan Jacobs. In the cottage industry of all things Lewis, this book stands out as one of the finest biographies of his life written to date. Jacobs is a superb writer, has done his research, unearths things even the most diehard Lewisians would not know, and packages it in a popular, accessible, and highly entertaining fashion.

Freakonomics by Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner. It is almost cliché to write that you started a book and couldn't put it down. Consider this cliché time. I was on a coast-to-coast flight, fatigued, ready to sleep, began to read and found myself ordering anything with caffeine so that I could keep the pages turning. Akin to Malcolm Gladwell's writings (in that it is filled with fascinating insights and information), but all through the lens of economics and how incentives often drive the world. "What this book is about is stripping a layer or two from the surface of modern life and seeing what is happening underneath." Levitt's conclusions have become flashpoints on any

number of cultural discussions, such as abortion (for good and ill), but all the more reason to give it a read.

Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell by Susanna Clarke. Okay, like last year, there is one title on the list over 350 pages. And it is only somewhat new (released in 2004). But I recently finished it, and had to include it. This is a remarkable novel, one that comes as close to anything in capturing the strange and hard-to-define distinctively English world of "Faery."

Free of Charge by Miroslav Volf. The work's subtitle expresses the theme of this book in perfect fashion: "Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace." Volf explores how "we are at our human best when we give and forgive. But we live in a world in which it makes little sense to do either one." When a theologian writes practical theology that nurtures the soul, and when the writer is of the caliber of Miroslav Volf, it is well worth the time to read.

The Resurrection of the Son of God by N.T. Wright. I haven't read theology this well-written, this page-turning, this informative and insightful, since....actually, no one has written books with this much depth and length in such an accessible way in recent memory. You won't agree with everything in Wright's corpus, but it would be difficult not to call this simply masterful.

The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order by Samuel P. Huntington. Another book released a few years ago. However, it enjoys one of those rare dynamics where it is more relevant now than when first released, and deserves to be rediscovered. It came out with Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*, which received all the press (featuring the idea that all of history had essentially ended with the fall of communism). Harrington's thesis was equally provocative, but more widely dismissed – namely that there were three great civilizations (Western, Asian, Islamic), that there would be great conflict between the West and Islam, and that Islam's militarism would force much upon the world. Fukuyama was proven wrong. Harrington has been proven right.

The Victory of Reason by Rodney Stark. In short, Stark argues – and convincingly, I might add – that "we owe our prosperity, freedom and progress to centuries of faith in one great, loving, and rational God." This book puts to rest the nonsense that the West had to overcome religious barriers to achieve its prominence.

Bonus Track (from the "Shameless Commerce Division"):

Just released:

A Mind for God by James Emery White (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

James Emery White

Sources

For the 2005 Summer Reading List: <http://www.seriousimes.com/pdf/update/1.10.pdf>

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