

Summer reading

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [October 11, 2000](#) issue

Though neither of my parents had a college education, I learned from them the joy of reading. Our home was one in which the Sunday *New York Times* was divided and carefully passed back and forth, and the crossword puzzle was a shared project. Winston Churchill's book on the Second World War was on the bookshelf, and so were Carl Sandburg's volumes on Abraham Lincoln.

My parents loved not only to read but to talk about what they were reading. When I was assigned Ole Edvart Rølvaag's *Giants in the Earth* in high school, my mother procured a library copy so we could discuss it. When my college sent out a recommended reading list to incoming freshmen, she ordered all the books and insisted that I take a volume to work on my summer job for the Altoona Water and Sewer Department. I recall having a copy of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* tucked in my back pocket and trying to explain to my fellow workers what it was about.

So I became a reader. Here are some of the books I put in my suitcase this summer—and I'm glad I did:

Adam Cohen and Elizabeth Taylor's biography of Richard J. Daley, *American Pharaoh*, is must reading for students of American urban politics and, of course, all Chicagoans. Jack Rogers's *Reading the Bible and the Confessions* was enormously helpful to this Presbyterian who hopes and prays for the day his church will be more inclusive. Rogers traces the way the church has changed its mind about what the Bible means by what it says in regard to race, slavery, divorce, remarriage, and the role of women.

A good friend gave me a copy of Philip Yancey's *What's So Amazing About Grace* and said, "You're going to like this." She was right. Yancey is such a good writer and such a generous evangelical that even though I occasionally disagree with his conclusions, I'm glad to be in the same family with him.

Another book that was on my list this past summer was Miroslav Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace*, a thoughtful and provocative exploration of some of the most vexing

theological, political and social dilemmas of our age.

I also loved being reintroduced to St. Augustine by Garry Wills's new, accessible biography, and especially encountering Augustine's insight that "since it is God we are speaking of, you do not understand. If you could understand, it would not be God." And Wills includes this delightful observation by Augustine, made near the end of his life when the doctrine of the incarnation was reshaping his views about human physicality: "Man's maker was made man that He, ruler of the stars, might nurse at His mother's breast."