

Daily patterns: Fall books: Reading habits

by [Thomas G. Long](#) in the [October 17, 2012](#) issue

My daily reading is tethered to the rhythms of the sun. In the evening, there is the slow burn of the substantial book beside the easy chair, which I savor in small portions. These days, I lean toward nonfiction—history, cultural analysis and theology mostly—with the occasional novel tossed in as a digestif. Right now David C. Holly’s absorbing account of 19th-century Baltimore paddle wheelers, *Steamboat on the Chesapeake*, which I picked up in a used bookstore, keeps the television turned off. Matthew Bowman’s *The Mormon People* is next on the stack.

Early mornings are marked by a different pattern, acquired years ago when I was a young pastor desperately scavenging for sermon material as the Sabbath relentlessly approached. Sipping a first cup of coffee, I operate like a pickpocket working a crowd, quickly scanning a multitude of possibilities, looking for the profitable takeaways. I gambol rapidly over a number of online newspapers—the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Huffington Post*, *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. I never miss the op-ed pieces of Eugene Robinson, Gail Collins, Maureen Dowd and Paul Krugman, and I watch for the bylines of sharp and provocative critics like Janet Maslin, James Wood, Leon Wieseltier and Stanley Fish.

I also dip into a few print magazines. My favorites are the *New Republic*, the *New Yorker* and the *New York Review of Books*. In the latter, I turn eagerly to the letters to the editor in the back pages, which almost unfailingly feature highly entertaining and usually informative academic slugfests between offended authors and their offending reviewers.

Occasionally, I admit, I will log onto one of the tabloids (the *New York Daily News* is a favorite) just to stay in touch with language working the discount trade. What keeps me returning are headlines like the one I ran across some years back: “Preacher Explodes During Sermon!” Wouldn’t want to miss another one like that.