

Read all about it: A door to the intellect and heart

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [October 19, 2004](#) issue

This issue's emphasis on books exemplifies one of the things I have most liked about the Christian Century over the years: it has helped me to decide what books to purchase and read. I'm still relying on it to do that. For example, I'd like to read all eight recommendations in the field of New Testament.

I'm reminded of my first investment in books. As a student pastor I was spectacularly unprepared to be a minister and to preach. A friend sent me to the old Pilgrim Press bookstore in Chicago; I found it in the Loop, climbed the stairs and explained my plight to the kind woman behind the counter. "I have \$100 to spend and need some books to help me get started being a minister."

She didn't blink, and better yet she didn't laugh out loud. She led me to the Bible section and pointed to an impressive set of encyclopedia-like volumes. She explained that *The Interpreter's Bible* contained both exegetical material and commentary, and she suggested that I purchase the volumes on the four Gospels, Romans and Exodus. I had money left over for the Book of Common Worship and two volumes of sermons. Her final gift to me was to refuse my money. Because I was a student, she said, I could have the books on account and pay for them when and how I was able.

I discovered shortly thereafter that my academic mentors didn't think highly of *The Interpreter's Bible*, but those volumes helped me for a while. They remain on my shelf as a kind of monument to that kind bookstore clerk and also to my initiation into a lifelong concern for connecting believing and thinking—which, for me, happens in the act of reading.

I believe more than ever that reading opens a door to the intellect and heart that visual forms such as television simply miss. I am sick to death of the political attack ads on television, which use every visual trick in the book to create a negative image. I snap off the television in disgust, wondering what these slick ads have to do

with the incredibly important decision the American people have to make.

Writing can be manipulative too, of course, but the act of reading generally involves critical faculties in a way that the viewing of images does not. Jeffrey McCall, a DePauw University professor of communication, recently commented in the *Chicago Tribune* about how to assess the televised presidential debates. He observed that “presidential elections are too important to turn on a consultant-designed one-liner.” McCall’s advice? Don’t watch the debate. Read about it in the newspaper the next day.