

SERIOUS TIMES

MAKING YOUR LIFE MATTER IN AN URGENT DAY

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Staying Current

In a question and answer session following a recent conference, I was asked how to stay "current," as in "current" affairs. Books, even fast-tracked, take months to follow such breaking events as the Terry Schiavo affair or the death of John Paul II. So how does one stay informed? I thought of the abundance of daily links on my AOL home page, the various weblogs that abound (www.christianitytoday.com is particularly good, and I confess to a daily visit to the Drudge Report). There are numerous radio programs designed to keep listener's in touch with the day's news, such as NPR's daily trilogy - "Morning Edition," "Talk of the Nation," and "All Things Considered" which, despite their obvious leanings, provide a capsule of each day's news and the currents swirling through our culture. And, of course, I am addicted to my daily newspaper.

Yet I continue to find myself best served through periodicals, and take advantage of an eclectic mix of magazines and journals that together serve me well. Here are some of my personal favorites for keeping abreast of the day's events, with weblinks that will allow you to investigate those which might be unfamiliar:

(The) Atlantic Monthly. (www.theatlantic.com) From the publisher: "This general editorial magazine focuses on contemporary social and cultural issues. Its emphasis includes a wide variety of subjects. The Atlantic Monthly encourages a rich and balanced lifestyle through commentary, criticism, fiction and humor." Dating from 1857; published monthly.

(The New York Times) Book Review. (www.nytimes.com) The premiere collection of reviews for new books, definitive bestseller lists, and ads for new releases of interest. Published weekly.

Books and Culture. (www.booksandculture.com) One of the most thoughtful, well-edited new Christian publications. This bi-monthly review focuses on new books, but covers film, figures, and more. Books are often brought together under varying themes, creating insightful bibliographic essays.

Christianity Today. (www.christianitytoday.com) Founded in 1956 by Billy Graham, and calling itself "A Magazine of Evangelical Conviction," CT is undoubtedly the leading feature and news periodical in Evangelical Christianity. One of the few magazines I go through cover-to-cover. Published monthly.

Fast Company. (www.fastcompany.com) Students of culture are notorious for overlooking the dynamics of the marketplace. *Fast Company*, along with *Business Week*, admirably fills that void. *Business Week* gives the news, *Fast Company* gives the zeitgeist, promising "Management, leadership, and career advice for business executives." Published monthly.

First Things. (www.firstthings.com) A journal of religion, culture and public life, *First Things* is shaped by Richard John Neuhaus, and has become one of the more influential Christian journals of the day. It is published by The Institute on Religion and Public Life, "an interreligious, nonpartisan research and education institute whose purpose is to advance a religiously informed public philosophy for the ordering of society." Published monthly.

Harper's Magazine. (www.harpers.org) Founded in 1850, and continuously published ever since, Harper's Magazine is home not only to the famed "Harper's Index" (a collection of facts designed to bemuse), but to thoughtful essays, readings from various sources, photo essays, stories, and, of course, reviews. In its own words, it is "an American journal of literature, politics, culture, and the arts." Published monthly.

(The) Hedgehog Review. (www.virginia.edu/iasc/hedgehog.html) As self-described, "*The Hedgehog Review* is an interdisciplinary, academic journal of critical reflections on contemporary culture, published three times a year by the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture. Each issue addresses a single theme with articles, interviews, books reviews, and an annotated bibliography written by leading scholars from throughout the disciplines." Edited by James Davison Hunter, this is one of the more thoughtful journals on culture in publication.

Newsweek. (www.newsweek.com) Along with *Time* and *U.S. News and World Report*, one of the three principal news magazines for the United States (*Time* has the larger subscription base, *Newsweek* sells more individual copies). Cover stories usually explore the most talked-about issues of the moment. Published weekly.

People. (www.people.com) Along with such publications as *US Weekly* and *Entertainment Weekly* (*People* has the larger circulation of the three), here is a clear window into pop/celebrity culture, which I believe is important to follow. Published weekly.

Times Literary Supplement. (www.the-tls.co.uk) The British counterpart to the New York Times Book Review. Its promise is to provide "comprehensive weekly coverage of the latest and most important publications, in every subject, in several languages – AND current theater, opera, exhibitions, and film." Published weekly.

Touchstone. (www.touchstonemag.com) Referring to itself as "A Journal of Mere Christianity," Touchstone openly admits its love affair with all things "inkling." Published by The Fellowship of St. James, Touchstone advertises itself as a "Christian journal, conservative in doctrine and eclectic in content, with editors and readers from each of the three great divisions of Christendom – Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox." Its essays are among the most thoughtful in print, with a heart for sanctity of life issues and the suffering church. Published monthly.

Utne. (www.utne.com) Boasting a "different read on life," *Utne* (rhymes with "chutney") delivers. As it describes itself, "Founded in 1984 by Eric Utne, UTNE MAGAZINE reprints the best articles

from over 2,000 alternative media sources bringing you the latest ideas and trends emerging in our culture... Provocative writing from diverse perspectives... Insightful analysis of art and media... Down-to-earth news and resources you can use... In-depth coverage of compelling people and issues that affect your life... The best of the alternative media." Published bi-monthly.

The Week. (www.theweekmagazine.com) Boasting "All you need to know about everything that matters," *The Week* is a unique periodical in that it provides a summary of U.S. and international media reports. Rather than offer its own reports, it summarizes what everyone else is reporting, revealing the many perspectives which abound. Or as it self-describes, "*The Week* is a witty, informative, important, and completely indispensable digest of the best reporting and writing from the U.S. and international press. In just 40 pages, it will bring you up to date on what's happening at home and abroad, and what the experts are saying about it." I've been hooked since day one. Published weekly.

World. (www.worldmag.com) One of the more conservative periodicals in Evangelicalism (some would use the term right-wing; whether a fair assessment or not, it is unashamedly conservative in its political stance), *World* positions itself as a Christian alternative to, say, *Newsweek* or *U.S. News and World Report*. Mission statement: "To report, interpret, and illustrate the news in a timely, accurate, enjoyable, and arresting fashion from a perspective committed to the Bible as the inerrant Word of God." Published weekly.

"Reading maketh a full man."
Francis Bacon, *Of Studies*.

James Emery White

About Serious Times

Launched in conjunction with the release of the book, *Serious Times* (InterVarsity Press, 2004), the aim of this site is to serve the vision of the book in an ongoing manner. At serioustim.es.com you will find reading lists and book reviews, "whitepapers" on critical issues and strategic links to other sites, small group resources and homeschooling curriculum, tapes/cd's and study guides. You can even sign-up for this bi-weekly "Serious Times Update."