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# Book 'em: Your last chance for summer reading

Heidi Schlumpf | Aug. 26, 2011

(Dreamstime)

Studies have shown that children who grow up in homes with lots of books do better in school. If that?s true, our children should end up as valedictorians. I bet I could single-handedly keep Ikea in business with my need for shelves to hold our family?s ever-expanding library.

Now vying for space among review copies of recent spirituality releases (mine) and doorstop-sized tomes about dead presidents (my husband?s) are *The Cat in the Hat*, *Blueberries for Sal* and assorted children?s literature. Our preschoolers, however, seem less interested in reading now that summer?s here and they can swim, ride bikes and dig in the garden.

For Mama and Daddy, though, the slower days of summer still prompt that desire to plop in a lawn chair and escape with a book. And I mean a real book ? not a Kindle, Nook or other e-reader. Because while this print journalist does get most of her news online (gasp!), she still prefers a good, old-fashioned printed book.

Among those I hope to pick up (and maybe even finish, preschoolers willing) are a number of religious, spiritual and Catholic books. As I compiled my wish list of summer reading for 2011, I realized all are by colleagues or folks who?ve graduated from colleague to friend. Here?s my list:

*Render Unto Rome: The Secret Life of Money in the Catholic Church* by Jason Berry (Crown): Long before the explosion of media about clerical sex abuse in Boston, Berry was reporting about the issue for NCR and in his book Lead Us Not Into Temptation (1992). Now Berry turns his investigative attention to the issue of how money is handled in the church -- and once again he finds scandal, secrecy and cover-up. I know this will be a painful book to read, but it should be required reading for any Catholic who puts money in the collection basket.

*Why Stay Catholic?: Unexpected Answers to a Life-Changing Question* by Michael Leach (Loyola Press): If Berry?s book has me wondering why I don?t give up on this flawed institution, I can always turn to the optimistic-yet-realistic reflections from Leach, editor emeritus at Orbis Books. Actually, this one is already checked off my list, as I reviewed the book for another publication in late spring, so I can highly recommend it for those needing a reminder about what?s good about the church.

*The Emerging Church: A Community?s Search for Itself by Tom Roberts* (Orbis): I also expect to be cheered up by *NCR* editor at large Roberts? new book (due out in September). After spending 18 months on the road visiting Catholics all over the country (which he documented in a series of *NCR* articles), Roberts remains hopeful about the future of the church in America. I look forward to his reflections and predictions.

*Prayers and Lies* by Sherri Wood Emmons (Kensington): I don?t often get to read novels, but this one by a Protestant friend is getting rave reviews. A coming-of-age story set in the South, its main character is a young girl who starts out with a naive faith that grows into a more ?shades of grey? kind of faith by the end. Emmons has already finished her second novel, which will be published next year.

*Great American Catholic Eulogies*, compiled and introduced by Carol DeChant (ACTA): It may sound macabre to want to read a collection of eulogies, but when you hear the list of those being eulogized, you?ll understand the attraction: Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, Andre Dubus, Tim Russert, Mother Katharine Drexel, Flannery O?Connor and Chaplain Fr. Mychal Judge are among the 50 Catholics who are remembered in this hardcover volume. An introduction by poet Thomas Lynch seals the deal that this is worth reading.

*You Complete Me and Other Myths That Destroy Happily Ever After* by Victoria Fleming (CreateSpace): While the institutional church rallies against gay marriage, plenty of heterosexual marriages are falling apart. Psychologist Fleming provides insight into some of the faulty thinking encouraged by our hyper-romantic culture, including, ?I married the perfect person,? ?Children will bring us closer together,? and ?We can go back to the way we were.? This is a self-published book by my sister?s sister-in-law, who is a Catholic and a therapist who believes in trying to save marriages.

*Flunking Sainthood: A Year of Breaking the Sabbath, Forgetting to Pray, and Still Loving My Neighbor* by Jana Riess (Paraclete): Author and blogger Riess, who is in the middle of a project to Tweet the entire Bible, undertook an earlier project to tackle 12 different spiritual practices, including fasting, fixed-hour prayer, gratitude and generosity. ?Really, how hard could that be?? she asks in this humorous memoir of how she fails at every single one. Luckily, it turns out that spiritual failure is a valuable practice in and of itself. (This book will be released Nov. 1.)

Nearly all of these books are available in Kindle editions. As for me, it?s time to buy more bookshelves.

[Heidi Schlumpf is the editor of *The Notre Dame Book of Prayer* (Ave Maria Press).]

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