

Reasons to Believe in Christian Publishing

Gerry Davey, of the Eastern Europe Literature Advisory Committee (EELAC), gives publishers ten good reasons to believe in their calling and the effectiveness of the ministry of the written word.

Thomas A. Kempis once wrote, "If he shall not lose his reward who gives a cup of cold water to his thirsty neighbors, what will not be the reward of those who by putting good books into the hands of their neighbors open to them the fountain of eternal life?" Christian publishing is a God-given calling. Here are ten reasons to believe in this ministry.



Books are important to God. The word "book" or "scroll" appears over 180 times in 34 of the books of the Scriptures. The phrase, "as it is written," or the command, "write these things," appear another 400 times. Books and writings are key in God's dealing with humanity.

Genesis 5:1 says "This is the book of the generations of Adam." In the last four verses of Revelation 22, the last chapter of the Bible, books are men-

tioned three times. Books are one of the principal ways in which God communicates with people.

In the *past*, Moses was aware of the importance of books in God's plan. As he descends from Mount Sinai and sees the golden calf he cries out, "Please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written" (Exod. 32:32). "The book you have written," he said. Just as the Son humbled himself to become a carpenter, so the Father humbled himself to become an author. Those who would despise books, despise part of the work of the Creator. Books were important in the past administration of God's kingdom.

For the *present*, books are intended to be a source of encouragement and strength for us. Jesus commands his disciples, "rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). Jesus wants them, and all believers, to be certain of the permanence and stability of their relationship with him, so he puts it in a suitable medium: writing, which

is permanent, fixed and reliable. Books are important in the present administration of God's kingdom.

Books also feature prominently in God's purposes for the *future*. At times people talk, with a somewhat superior attitude, about what they call "the post-literature era." They think publishing is something of the past and that now Christians should move on. However, there is no "post-literature" era this side of eternity.

The Scriptures speak of a book God is keeping about humankind. "A river of fire was flowing ... out from before [the Ancient of Days]. Thousand upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated and the books were opened" (Dan. 7:10). "I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books" (Rev. 20:12).

Books will be important in the future administration of God's kingdom.

Books are important to God. What is important to God should be important to Christians. Therefore, the Church can work wholeheartedly in other kinds of ministries, but it should never, never be deceived into abandoning the written word.



Literature is very effective in popularizing ideas. "I would rather write a pamphlet than speak at 20 mass rallies." A rather

startling statement from a person named Vladimir Ilych Ulyanov—better known as Lenin. In 1907 Lenin, with 17 supporters, developed the principles of Bolshevism—a philosophy totally alien to the Russian people. By 1917, largely through the use of literature, he had won 40,000 supporters and conquered Russia. When the Berlin Wall was torn down in 1990, one billion people (a fifth of the world's population) were under communist control. At their peak, the Soviets spent more than three billion dollars a year on propaganda. Christians, who have the true,

are not widely circulated among the masses in this country, I do not know what is going to become of us as a nation. If truth is not diffused, error will be. If God and his Word are not known and received, the Devil and his works will gain the ascendancy."

Books are an effective tool for communicating ideas. And, it is as ideas are formed, thoughts are changed, and wills given new priorities and motivations, that action is generated to change the behavior of individuals, communities and nations.



Books change the course of history.

Books, significant books, do not just record history. They shape it. Think of those crucial times in history where the influence of literature has been absolutely vital—the Old Testament revival under Josiah; the Lord Jesus substantiating his authority on the written Old Testament scriptures; the whole Reformation; John Wesley and the Methodists; British social reform in the 18th and 19th centuries; the whole foreign missions enterprise, etc. Literature has a key role both in outreach and in the nurture of individuals and churches. Any strategy to achieve world evangelization that does not significantly employ literature is seriously defective.

The above examples show times in church history when literature played a vital role. Consider, though, the whole course of human history. Someone once said, "All the revolutions of the modern age were initiated by a campaign of printed materials of various kinds." Billy Graham states quite categorically, "Every momentous event in modern history, whether for good or ill, has been brought about through writing." The pen *is* mightier than the sword.

The efficacy of writing is sometimes challenged by people who quote an old English proverb: "A picture is worth a thousand words." They argue that something visual or graphic is worth more than something verbal or conceptual. But, the worth varies according to what one is attempting to accomplish. If a publisher wants to make a quick

passive impact and get a largely emotionally based response, then a picture or image is effective. However, if the goal is to touch the emotions and reach the mind so as to stir the will to responsive action, then the superior method is to use words.

A few well-chosen words crafted into simple sentences can have enormous effect on multitudes. The brief paragraphs of the Lord's Prayer and the Beatitudes are biblical passages that spring to mind. Who can tell the influence on American history of Abraham Lincoln's short "Gettysburg Address?" Or consider the resolve that Winston Churchill's words gave the whole British nation when alone it faced the prospect of Nazi invasion: "We will fight them on the beaches, we will fight them in the fields, we will fight them in the valleys, we will fight them in the hills; we will never surrender."

Words are powerful. They even shape history. Therefore, publishers and distributors of Christian literature must insist their products are true to Scripture, relevant to culture and of enduring quality. By influencing what is produced and how it is distributed, publishers influence the whole course of history.



Books change lives.

How many people have been significantly helped, toward salvation, through literature? Perhaps they were

helped through a New Testament or some portion of Scripture; a Bible correspondence course; a tract or pamphlet or Christian book or magazine. John Wesley was converted by reading the introduction to Luther's *Commentary on Galatians*. John Newton, captain of a slave ship, found faith and forgiveness in the middle of an Atlantic storm as he read *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas A. Kempis. William Wilberforce, the great English social reformer, was awakened to spiritual reality by reading *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* by Philip Doddridge. Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, was converted through Christian literature. More recently, in Britain, a relatively unknown author,

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pure, and liberating message of the Gospel, should be at least if not more motivated to use literature for their cause.

Dr. Coggan, former Archbishop of Canterbury, writes in his book *Convictions*, "We need a flood of literature which incorporates Christian insights and the Christian philosophy of life. To dedicate your life to this is to wield about the sharpest weapon for good and for God that any man or woman can handle."

Daniel Webster said more than 150 years ago in the USA, "If religious books

George MacDonald, wrote fine literary Christian fiction. His books came into the hands of a professor of literature called C. S. Lewis. These literary writings significantly helped Lewis to come to faith and he in turn wrote several dozen books, including *Mere Christianity*. Former USA presidential aide, Charles Colson, a hardened lawyer

Books do not merely record human history. They change it.

and politician, studied this title and became a believer. He in turn has written more books and these are bringing yet more people to Christ. The chain goes on.

The seed Christian publishers sow now will determine the kind of harvest they will reap in the next 10 or 20 years. If they distribute superficial books, they will reap superficial Christians. If their literature is sloppy and thoughtless, its readers will tend to be careless and easily led astray. If the appeal is mainly to the emotions and if it over-emphasizes the spectacular and dramatic, the recipients will tend to be unstable and immature. If the focus is exclusively on the intellect, publishers can expect believers who are argumentative and cold, lacking compassion. But, if publishers insist that the seed sown appeals to both heart and mind, then they can expect a harvest of Christians who are strong, warm, confident and gracious; who know both what they believe and how to relevantly share it with those around them.



Publishing builds up the Church.

Deuteronomy 31:9-13 says, "Moses wrote down this law and [...] commanded [the priests and elders]: 'At the end of every seven years ... read this law [out loud]. Assemble [all] the people—men, women and children, and the aliens living in your towns—so that they can listen and

learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God.'"

Books provide a spiritual preservative from generation to generation. Though the Reformation touched many countries in Europe, only those nations that had built on Luther's writings to establish Protestantism on a clearer intellectual basis survived the Counter-Reformation a few decades later.

Well-argued, charitably presented titles can play a vital role in helping believers detect, resist and refute false doctrines.

Many Christians, especially those young in the faith, go through times of doubt in varying degrees concerning their faith. Well-written apologetics can significantly help to stabilize and strengthen them in such periods.

When believers grow weary, biographies can help to get them moving again. When they feel discouraged and ask, "Is it all worthwhile?", Christian books, magazines, and periodicals can remind them how God *is* working in a very significant way today to accomplish his purpose.



Literature endures.

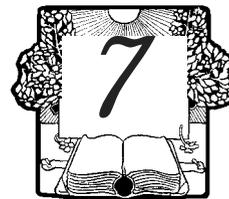
Bill Bright, who founded Campus Crusade, once said, "If I had to choose between writing and speaking, I'd choose writing. Literature lives on long after the spoken word is forgotten."

Literature lasts. It is permanent. Once set down, it is fixed.

When it is important to have accurate records of any communication, it is customary to put them in written form. The Bible says "Put it in writing so that it cannot be altered" (Dan. 6:8).

Many people who are careless with words tend to be careful once they have to write. Good writing causes both the writer and the reader to think more precisely and deeply. Writing implies a commitment on the part of the author to certain values or to a particular philosophy, because as long as the title is in circulation, the reader can challenge what has been written.

The great Puritan writer Thomas Brookes stated, "Books may preach when the author cannot; when the author may not; when the author dares not; yes, and what is more, when the author is not."

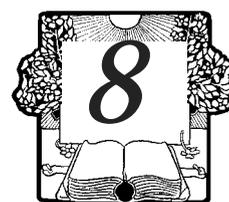


Books accommodate themselves to the reader. Books speak only when the reader is prepared to listen.

Literature *never* forces itself upon someone not ready to receive and consider it, but it is always there when he or she is ready. It can provoke, convict, anger, or say hard things when necessary, without straining or breaking personal relationships. The speed at which literature is read is determined by the reader who can always, without embarrassment, backtrack to re-read a portion.

Samuel Zwemer says, "No other agency can penetrate so deeply, witness so daringly, abide so persistently and influence so irresistibly as the printed page."

In war-torn Serbia, the evangelical church, though still tiny, doubled in size in just a few years. A local pastor explained it was because, "People were prepared to listen and we gave out more literature in the last five years than in the previous 500."



Literature can help all other kinds of ministry to be more effective.

Radio, TV, humanitarian relief and development, preaching, teaching, church-planting, counseling and other kinds of ministry can all be given greater impact through the sensitive use of appropriate literature. Literature given out *before* an event can create curiosity and arouse hunger for spiritual things. Given out *during* the event, it can consolidate the impact of the message. Given out *after* the event, it will help in follow-up.

It is pointless to discuss "Should Christians publish or preach?" It is like asking which wing of an airplane should take priority. Both preaching and publishing are necessary. The

absence of either brings disaster. Literature ministry that is to bring growth and maturity to the church demands publishers do everything possible to increase their competence while at the same time highly esteeming those engaged in other forms of ministry.

Amar Jyothi, an Indian ministry, reported "There have been around 40,000 professions of faith in Orissa and most of them are the result of literature distribution over the years."

Literature is a means to an end. It is not the end itself.



Publishing maximizes the Lord's gifts to the Church.

Books enable people with a great ministry to have an even greater one.

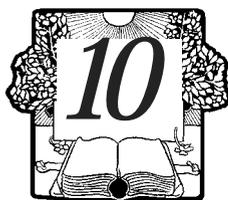
They also enable ordinary believers to have an extraordinary ministry.

A person who is not an evangelist can distribute the titles of Billy Graham and unleash the spiritual gifts of one of the world's most effective evangelists and Bible communicators.

A person who is not a Bible teacher can share the titles of John Stott and bring top-rate exposition and Bible understanding to the church.

Someone with no gifts of literary composition nor the well-honed arguments of an apologist, can propagate the works of C. S. Lewis and influence the thinking of literary and intellectual people in society.

Anyone, through literature, can be powerfully used as a counselor, comforter, admonisher, or encourager. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12). Only a few hundred thousand people heard Jesus on earth. By the grace of God, literature allows publishers to reach many more people.



Books make the task of world evangelization possible.

All Christians should continually remember the Lord's last recorded words

on earth: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

That great Canadian pastor, Oswald J. Smith, whose church raised millions of dollars for overseas missions, stated that, "After studying the challenge of world evangelism for more than 50 years, the only plan I have heard of that would result in the fulfillment of the Great Commission is a literature distribution ministry."

More recently, speaking about the importance of God's Word and the printed page in evangelism, Ralph Winter of the US Center for World Mission, says, "There are two things in the entire history of missions that have been absolutely central. One, obviously, is

the Bible itself. The other is the printed page. There is absolutely nothing else, in terms of mission methodology, that outranks the importance of the printed page. Meetings come and go and personalities appear and are gone. But, the printed page continues to speak."

"The printed page," wrote Samuel Zwemer, "is a missionary that can go anywhere and do so at minimum cost. It enters closed lands and reaches all strata of society. It does not grow weary. It needs no furlough. It lives longer than any missionary. It never gets ill. It penetrates through the mind to the heart and conscience. It has and is producing results everywhere. It has often lain dormant yet retained its life and bloomed years later."

The words of William Carey, often called the founder of modern missions, still challenge Christians: "Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God." God *is* doing great things through Christian publishing in this generation. ❖

GOD GAVE US A BOOK

The Bible as literature is an important topic, the subject of numerous articles. However, the significance of the Bible being a book is rarely discussed. Yet God has entrusted his Word to writing, and his divine words are printed—pressed into—the pages of a book.

Plato, the great Greek philosopher and writer, questioned the value of writing. He even exiled poets from his ideal republic, naming them liars because of their figurative uses of words. Nevertheless, the God who "spoke" and thereby created the cosmos speaks to us through a book of prose and poetry. God inspired the creative genius of narrators and storytellers, historians and poets, prophets and evangelists, who in the pages of a single book have given us God's Word.

The psalmist declares, "My tongue is the pen of a skillful writer" (Ps. 45:1), and proclaims the primacy of writing over the

spoken word. From "every word that comes from the mouth of God" to "it is written," the Bible shows the enormity of the God's wager in favor of the book as a faithful means of transmission of His message. Its multiple books are bound together into a single book. Its books appear in the form a single book whose diversity does not obscure its profound thematic and conceptual unity. Every book has a beginning and an end. The Bible, which begins with the origin of the universe (Genesis) and ends with the consummation of all things (Revelation), is a type of creation, an encyclopedic analogy of the subordination of time and space to the sovereignty of God. The Bible contains the history of human beings: their creation and fall, glory and misery, life and death, salvation and perdition. The nexus that unifies the cosmological vision of the Bible is Jesus Christ. In him converge the times of the sacred history. The Bible's metaphors and symbols point toward him.

—Stuart Park, "The Bible as a Book," Andamio, SPAIN