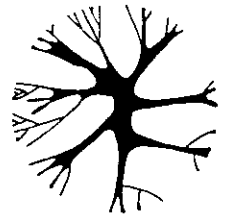


RESEARCH TRENDS IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION



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Reading, the Book, and Religion

The Review Article has highlighted some of the ways in which contemporary book publishing and the reading culture are changing. Religious publishing and the reading of religious books are changing too. This section asks, who reads religious books? It also explores some of the challenges facing religious publishers in the Third World. It ends with the statement of the German Catholic Bishops on *Books and Reading* which reaffirms the Church's continuing commitment to the 'reading culture'.

Who Reads Religious Books?

Like other publishers, religious publishers need to know their public and their market. There have been some attempts to conduct research into the reading interests and habits of buyers of religious books, notably in West Germany, but still there is a great need to know more about which people read religious books and what they read religious books for. Beyond the research into the public

for religious books is the further question of what marketing strategies religious bookshops and religious publishers can adopt to serve and widen their public. This section reports on research into these questions in the United States, France and West Germany.

The USA: An Evangelical Revival

Judith S. Duke. *Religious Publishing and Communications* (White Plains, NY: Knowledge Industry Publications, 1981).

Duke's main purpose is to analyse the structure and economics of the religious communications industry and indicate demographic, economic and social trends which may influence its future growth. She also analyses trends in the markets for Jewish books, Bibles and general religious books as well as discussing book club, record, magazine and broadcasting markets.

The Market for Religious Books

In 1977 the total market for religious communication was estimated at \$1,016.7 million. Of this \$249 million (24.5%) was accounted for by religious book publishing. However, religious book publishing only accounts for between 4% and 5% of total book industry sales.

Four major types of publishers produce religious books: 1) large general publishers, eg, Doubleday. 2) denominational presses, eg, Abingdon Press, Paulist Press, 3) independent religious publishers, eg, Zondervan and 4) university presses, eg, Oxford and Cambridge University Presses which publish Bibles and scholarly religious books. In addition there are about 20 religious book clubs and several religious book services. Leading clubs are the Catholic Digest Book Club, the Protestant Family Bookshelf, and the Jewish Book Club. Membership ranges from a combined total of 150,000 in the four clubs run by the Christian Herald Association to 1,500 in the Augsburg Reading Club. In 1979 there were 2,751 religious bookshops in the USA out of a total of 15,163 book outlets including 4,638 general and 2,442 college bookshops.

More than 2,000 religious book titles were published in 1978, representing 5.3% of all titles published. Throughout the 1970s the number of paperback religious titles showed a marked increase. In 1971 paperbacks accounted for 36% of religious titles, in 1976

they accounted for over 50% for the first time, and by 1978 they were 54.2% of all religious titles. The 1978 figure represents 1,182 titles (only 10% of which were mass market paperbacks) or 10.5% of all the paperbacks published.

Trends in the religious book market parallel the fortunes of organized religion in general. Immediately after World War II there was a religious boom and religious publishing expanded. The upheavals (social and ecclesiastical) of the 1960s saw Catholic publishing, non-evangelical denominational imprints and some general houses suffering; the evangelical book market remained firm. In the middle and late 1970s growing support for evangelical and conservative Christianity stimulated a marked increase in the number of religious bookshops, readers and book titles.

Religious Book Buyers and Their Books

The general profile of the religious book buyer which emerges from several surveys reveals her to be married, aged between 26 and 48 and probably a high school graduate. Over half of religious book buyers (56.5%) in 1975 did not have a college education, while 41.1% had graduated from high school. Fewer than 50% of religious bookshop customers in 1977 belonged to a local church. Up to 70% of religious book buyers are women.

Excluding the Bible, which remains the bestselling book, which were the most popular religious books in the 1970s? By the end of 1977 at least 74 titles in print had sold over 1 million copies, compared to only 27 titles in 1974. Of these 74 titles, 64 were new titles (ie, not reprints of religious classics). By 1981 over 500 religious titles had sales over 100,000 copies.

The leading religious bestsellers in 1977 were *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Zondervan), 9 million copies; *The Way* (Tyndale),

4 million; *I've Got to Talk to Somebody, God* (Doubleday), 2 million; *How To Be Born Again* (Word), 1 million, 50 thousand; *Born Again* (Chosen-Word) 1 million; *Joni* (Zondervan), 1 million; *Angels, God's Secret Agents* (Doubleday), 1 million; and *Why Not the Best* (Broadman), 1 million.

The most consistent sellers are personal and inspirational evangelical works at one end of the market, and scholarly books

West Germany: The Potential of Religious Books

Helmut Volpers. "Who Reads Religious Books in Germany?" *Media Development*, Vol 29, No 3, 1982, p. 27-29.

Since 1958 there have been six major studies of the book market in West Germany. Two, *Lesekultur in Deutschland* (1968) and *Kommunikationsverhalten und Buch* (1978) contain information about religious books. In addition in 1969 a study, *Religioses Buch und Christlicher Buchhandel*, was conducted on behalf of the Catholic and Protestant booksellers' associations. The results of these studies are analysed by Volpers.

Interest in Religious Books

The 1968 study discovered that of the adult population (over 16) which read books, 13% were interested in books with a religious content. However, 18% of women expressed interest as opposed to only 8% of men. Interest in religious literature increased with age and was independent of the education level reached.

The 1969 study found that 32% of Protestants and 31% of Catholics could be regarded as potential readers of religious books. These high figures are somewhat suspect because of the broad way in which interest was defined.

The potential readers were divided into those who viewed religion as closely connected with a particular church and those who did not. Those with a strong church connection expressed much interest in reading about the realisation of Christianity in daily life (53%), the Christian bringing up of children (51%), renewal in the church (49%), the life of Jesus (43%) and daily prayer (40%). Those less identified with the church were interested in the Christian rearing of children (39%), Christianity in daily life (31%) and church renewal (30%). More of this category were interested in daily prayer (16%) than in the life of Jesus (13%).

Reading Religious Books

Expressed interest is not a reliable guide to actual reading habits. The 1978 survey discovered that out of the general adult (over 18) population, 36% of those over 45 years old read religious books. Only 9% of the 18-29 age group and 11% of the 30-44 age group

like the Anchor Bible at the other. Books written by women for women are popular, and most popular of all (as the bestseller list shows) are inspirational personal accounts such as testimonials by "born-again" Christians. The Catholic book market is growing in the areas of contemporary spirituality and the charismatic movement.

also claimed to read such books. Again more women (12%) than men (10%) read religious books.

The 1969 study found that even among readers of religious books, religious literature came only fourteenth in a ranking of the different books which interested them. When the figures for interest and for reading are compared, it is easily seen that the topics most often mentioned as of interest are not necessarily those most often read.

The six topics most often cited as of interest to Protestants were critical studies of Christianity (37%), Christian living (33%), mission (32%), other religions and ideologies (29%), Christian fiction (28%), and questions of belief (24%). Catholics placed Christian living and church renewal equal first (34%), followed by critical studies (33%), mission (32%), Christian fiction (28%), and questions of belief (27%).

When asked whether they had read books on such topics over the past two or three years, the readers gave a somewhat different picture. Among Protestants 15% had read books dealing critically with Christianity, on mission, and Christian fiction. Among Catholics, 17% had read Christian fiction, 14% saints' lives, and 13% on Christianity in daily life, on mission, and on church renewal.

The researchers also investigated Bible reading habits and discovered that 71% of Catholics and 65% of Protestants seldom or never read the scriptures. Only 5% of Catholics and 12% of Protestants read the Bible frequently.

Volpers observes that the religious content of ostensibly secular literature needs to be taken into account in gauging the extent of religious reading. A recent example is the novel *Ansichten eines Clowns* by Heinrich Böll of which a major theme was the development of Catholicism in post-war Germany.

Volpers concludes that the "religious book not only has a good chance of survival but has a steady place in the literary culture of West Germany".

France: Developing a Church Book Policy

Communication Humaine Aujourd'hui, "Dossier: Le Livre", No 83 (November) 1980.

The number of new religious titles published in France each year is relatively small. In 1980, for example, there were 500 new titles while in Britain 1,293 were published. Nevertheless the number of new religious book titles in France has steadily increased since 1975 when 324 were issued. (Five years earlier 490 new titles had been published). In 1980, 927 religious books were published in total.

The Catholic Church in France has set up the Office Chrétien du Livre to co-ordinate and encourage the work of the church in relation to books and reading. The Office is now part of the organization Chrétiens-Médias which is the national federation of Catholic agencies in the fields of information and communication. In 1980 the Office du Livre prepared a report for the forthcoming assembly of the French Bishops at Lourdes.

The Church and the Religious Book

The report outlined the problems facing the church in the world

of the book. Five general problems were identified: 1) the lack of authors able to write for the general public; 2) the authors of religious books tended to be the same people: there was need to encourage new young authors; 3) the reading public for religious books is changing, eg, more lay people are studying theology and requiring new books (biographies, contemporary spirituality, introductions to scripture etc); 4) there are few 'timely' books which address current ideas as they occur; and 5) the clergy seem to know little about religious books and rarely recommend them.

The Religious Bookshop

There are about 140 religious bookshops in France. The report of the Office du Livre points out that on the whole these bookshops feel that their work is misunderstood by the church. They also feel that it is unjust of the church to engage in unfair competition by selling religious books direct to the public. In the view of the Office

the church authorities and the bookshops need to come together to agree on a policy for selling church publications.

Another important issue is that of making religious books available in secular bookshops. This is a problem raised by Duke in her survey of the US religious book business. However, if secular bookshops are to agree to stock religious books, they have to be assured of the support of the local Christian community. This needs a concentrated effort to alert the local church to the value of books and reading in religious matters.

Religious Publishing in the Third World

Michael Traber "Christian Book Publishing in the Third World: Some Principles, Criteria and Proposals" in Tomy Luiz (ed) *Communicatio Socialis Yearbook 1981-1982*. (Indore, MP452001 India: Satprakashan Sanchar Kendra, 1982), p. 142-150.

Clarence Srambical 'Hindi Catholic Publishing: Some Problems, Some Solutions' in Tomy Luiz (ed) *Communicatio Socialis Yearbook 1982-1983*, p. 115-123.

Michael Traber's analysis of Christian book publishing in Third World countries concentrates upon the Catholic church. In comparison with Protestant churches, Catholics have not given book development a high priority in missionary work. Traber argues that there is a need to develop the numerous existing Catholic printing presses into publishing houses. Srambical's detailed examination of Hindi Catholic Publishing reveals some of the obstacles standing in the way of developing indigenous Christian book publishing. Together Traber and Srambical pinpoint some of the key issues currently facing Christian publishing in the developing world.

The Witness of Christian Publishing

Traber argues that Christian publishing is an extension of the central mystery of the Incarnation "Words which are an actualization of the Words of God, or a preparation for them, or a concrete application of them, are embodied in print". Christian publishing is a public, lasting witness which comprises total Christian living, i.e. the whole man with all his needs.

Christian publishing is, therefore, not simply "preaching through a book" but is a response to the message of faith and a witness to faith which is rooted in the life of the community. What implications this theology has for Christian publishing in developing nations is brought out by Traber under four main headings: 1) the cultural leadership of the Church; 2) books for reflection and critical awareness; 3) literacy, literature and human development; and 4) the development of a book publishing programme.

The Cultural Leadership of the Church

A pressing problem in most Third World countries is the need to develop an authentic national identity and a viable national culture. In Africa this search for identity is often coupled with a desire to reaffirm traditional religious values. To Traber the African search for spiritual and national roots is a challenge to Christianity to become truly part of indigenous culture. Christian books, especially books of stories and novels, could play a significant part in helping Third World countries find their own cultural voice. At present, with one or two notable exceptions, such as the Indian Tamil epic by Kannadhasan on the life of Christ (*Yesu Kaaviam*), great literature inspired by Christianity is not promoted by Christian publishers.

Books for Reflection and Critical Awareness

In addition to the promotion of authentic national literature the Church should also seek to publish books to foster self-reflection and critical awareness. At present the 'spiritual guides' of the Third World are national political leaders. There is a need for Christian publishers to seek out thinkers who can offer different spiritual

Promoting the Reading Habit

On a more general level there is an urgent need to educate the clergy and laity about the value of reading. The Office du Livre notes that it is ever more difficult to make sharp distinctions between religious and non-religious literature. There is much of *religious* value to be gained from reading and reflecting upon the best of modern writing, fiction, and non-fiction. The church must encourage reading in schools and seminaries and the clergy must read more.

and cultural perspectives. Helping people reflect and think is an essential part of promoting true human development.

It has long been recognized that literacy is essential to socio-economic development. The Church that is concerned with the whole man will be committed to promoting literacy. It can help by providing follow-up material for new literates, publishing childrens' books, setting up small community libraries, book kiosks, and book clubs. In order to do all this, however, the Church needs to set up book publishing houses.

Developing a Book Publishing Programme

Traber notes that Third World countries have an immediate need for three types of books: the "how-to-do" practical book; the "counselling" book which interprets people's problems and the rapid social changes which are taking place in most nations; and the "narrative" and the "song", new genres of literature and poetry. Catholic publishers should become involved in publishing all three kinds of books and in particular they should give much more attention to literature.

Traber concludes by asserting that in book publishing creative and well managed Catholic publishing houses can become financially self-reliant. Their profitability can be built up by the sale of steady selling items such as catechisms, hymnbooks and prayerbooks. They may also need to develop their own distribution outlets, ie, bookshops, book-stalls, and mail-order marketing.

A printing press can be a very useful source of income but Traber warns that the printing press must serve the overall publishing needs and not become a purely commercial operation. Catholic printing presses should be semi-commercial, using the profits from commercial work to subsidize Christian book publishing. On the basis of the existing Catholic printing presses, Traber sees the possibility of building up more viable Catholic publishing houses.

Catholic Hindi Publishing

Srambical's analysis of Catholic Hindi publishing pinpoints the key obstacles towards developing indigenous Christian publishing. In the first place, there are few creative Christian writers. The Church in North India is still in its infancy and its support is strongest among the poorest and least educated people. Secondly, the emphasis on English in Church schools means that the few Catholic writers who do exist are more at home in English than in Hindi.

More general problems include a lack of professionalism among authors and publishers and the lack of proper professional and technical training. There is a generally low standard of book production, a lack of quality paper and low standards of design. Distribution and promotion of books are inadequate. Even more important, the potential public for Hindi Catholic books is poor with little disposable income. Books are a luxury.

Co-operation and Co-publishing

There are, however, some indications of how these problems might be overcome. Scrambical notes that publishers can reduce their costs and keep book prices down in several ways. They can cooperate in the publication, promotion and distribution of books. Another way would be for one publisher to manufacture a book and to sell the sheets to another in a different region. When publishing across language boundaries the artwork and illustrations can be printed in one region and combined with different language texts printed locally. Finally, publishers can cooperate in buying paper in bulk.

There are signs that some of these ideas are being implemented. Scrambical's own publishing house, Satprakashan Sanchar Kendra, has successfully co-published several titles including, for example,

Inculturation in Seminary Formation, which was a joint production with Ishvani of Poona. The Hindi Catholic publishers are becoming more aware of the benefits of co-operation and collaboration.

Promoting the Hindi Language

In the long run, the development of a Hindi Catholic literature depends upon the success of the Church in promoting the use of the Hindi language. Hindi is beginning to be used as a medium of instruction in Catholic seminaries and the Bishops have set up a Hindi literary commission. The growth of Hindi Catholic publishing will be one sign that the Church has become truly rooted in the Hindi-speaking community.

German Bishops on Books and Reading: Extracts from the 1980 Statement

On November 9, 1980, the Communication Commission of the German Bishop's Conference published a declaration concerning the importance of reading and books for society and the Church. The English translation by Bernhard Fibicher was published in *Media Development*. (Vol 29, No 3, 1982. London: World Association for Christian Communication). The German text was published in *Communicatio Socialis*, (Vol 14, 1982, pp. 88-92).

The inhabitants of the Federal German Republic spend on average some 5 to 6½ hours per day with media, including TV, radio, records, sound cassettes, newspapers, magazines and books, cinema, theatre, concerts and telephone. TV and radio claim 60-70% and reading books 15% of the time dedicated to media, which is more than that spent on records, cassettes, cinema, theatre, concerts and telephone calls together. The book is not destined to disappear; whatever attention modern media demand, they cannot diminish the value and the benefit of books.

The Religious Book

The religious book is of the utmost importance in connection with questions about the meaning and direction of our existence. As a vehicle for the Good News and as a testimony of its followers, it can help orientate and make decisions. A study completed in Spring 1980 showed that every second inhabitant of the Federal German Republic (older than 14) repeatedly turned to religious books in the course of a year, every third inhabitant picked them up at least once a month.

Resorting to religious books was occasioned by situations confronting basic problems of human existence: birth and death, joy and sorrow, personal and shared pain, the beginning or the end of a period in life, a new partnership or a parting. On such occasions, one willingly turns to books in order to see more clearly and to meditate. More than a third of the German population would like, in the course of a year, to buy suitable books. This is proof of the evident popularity of religious books; furthermore, the above mentioned investigation has shown that people prefer the book to any other medium when they are concerned with questions about the meaning of life or religious guidance.

The Contribution of Catholic Publishers and Bookshops

The Church made early contributions to the history of our book culture. These efforts ought to be sustained. Thus, the contribution of church publishers to book culture and to the plurality of the media in our society will be inevitable in the future. The publishing houses often run high economic risks: the Church for her part must be ready to examine the offers of publishing houses carefully and impartially, to enter into positive, yet critical conversation and to stimulate further efforts. Every reader, after all, is responsible for the fact that an independent and many-sided publishing house remains efficient and free of any political or other control in the competition between the media conglomerates.

It is important that the reader can find in bookshops and libraries a supply of books dealing with his questions and searchings, books that help him to make a connection between reading and living. Catholic publishers and booksellers know that it is their duty to help to survey the immense amount of material offered by the book-market, to suggest orientations to the reader which correspond to his interests and thereby to bring literature with a Catholic outlook within reach. This is not an easy task today: such a service must be encouraged and respected in order to be efficient in the future. The personality and attitude of the persons concerned with the distribution of books is intimately linked with the peculiar features of the book itself. For this reason, Catholic booksellers are interested in the further qualified training of their co-workers.

Church libraries for the public

We cannot renounce the possibilities offered by the Catholic public libraries in the parishes today. Their working methods and their way of offering material have gone beyond the mere lending out of light reading.

They have accumulated (in dynamic parishes) rich and qualified materials at the disposal of the public. The Catholic public libraries make available: information about the Church and the world; information for orientation in certain domains of one's life; for help and stimulation in one's profession and leisure — besides the best of old and modern literature. Self-evidently, those libraries are at the service of pastoral and educational work; instruction and aid for communal life in the parish is at everybody's disposal.

The Future of Book Culture

In order to guarantee the future of the book culture, it is necessary: to promote comprehensive reading training that enables everybody to take part in social life, in the transmission and presence of human thoughts and feelings, in the knowledge of God's revelation; to enter into the questions that life addresses to us via literature; to secure the free and manifold production and distribution of books and other publications in such a way as not to be exposed to political and economic pressures; to make the books and publications in public libraries and other centres of distribution accessible to everyone and to encourage them with the support of public monies; to motivate the parishes to recognise their duties in this area and to give attention to these duties in an up-to-date manner; to create and secure the conditions responsible for the further development of reading and book culture in society.