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Increasing Lay Interest in Christian Literature

H. W. Gockel

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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has been arbitrarily but definitely circumscribed by subjective prejudice.

And yet the Modernist has a creed. True, it is chiefly negative, consisting in denials of Christian truths; nevertheless it is a creed. It may be summarized as follows: 1) The Bible a human record of religious experiences; 2) the Divine Immanence; 3) evolution in religious, moral, and social institutions; 4) the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man; 5) the Christ of experience, not the Christ of history; 6) the moral-influence theory of the Atonement; 7) the social gospel; 8) the Kingdom of God a this-worldly kingdom. Where these principles have been accepted, Christianity has been eliminated.⁵⁹⁾

Thus Congregationalism has exerted an influence in American theology out of proportion to its numerical strength. It has furnished a relatively larger number of significant theologians than any other denomination. The reason for this is, no doubt, that from Robert Browne (ca. 1580), John Robinson (ca. 1600), William Brewster (1620) down to Lyman Abbott Congregationalists have been "seekers." Instead of being bound by creeds the Congregational churches believe "that their contribution to Christianity is that they meet today's needs in today's way by today's unfettered judgment."⁶⁰⁾ Congregationalism encourages a spirit of adventure, grants utmost liberty to its followers, and thereby attracts and encourages such scholars as glory in their wisdom. The great contribution of the Lutheran theologian is that, keeping his reason captive in obedience to God's Word, he proclaims nothing but "the faith once delivered to the saints." Jude 3. F. E. MAYER

Increasing Lay Interest in Christian Literature

Ink in the Service of the Church

If you were to make a trip to the historic Wartburg, where Luther translated the New Testament into German, the guide would draw your attention to an inkspot on the wall. This inkspot, you would be told, was made when Luther hurled his inkwell at the devil.

There is a legend that ever since that time, more than 400 years ago, the devil has been afraid of ink. And well he might be, for it was the ink of the printer which in the days of the Reformation and throughout succeeding years proclaimed the day of doom for Satan's empire and the day of grace for all mankind.

59) In 1913 the National Council of Congregational Churches issued a statement of faith, which while employing Scriptural terminology is so vague that it is virtually meaningless. Fagley, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-68.

60) *Christian Century*, July 6, 1938, p. 841.

Today the religious press is a mighty bulwark against the forces of evil which are seeking to engulf the world and are storming the gates of the Christian Church. "Our religious press," said President Roosevelt recently, "can be a guide and a beacon, a real tower of strength, in this momentous struggle. It seems to me that it should come within the special province of the religious press to proclaim the strength which lies in spiritual things."

To us, of course, the "spiritual things" which the religious press is to proclaim are the "things of the *Spirit*" of which the great Apostle wrote. Sin, grace, salvation through the blood of Christ, and a life of devotion to the Savior and His cause—these are the "spiritual things" which the Lutheran press is proclaiming throughout the world today!

Ink in the Service of the Church's Enemies

But not all the inkpots of the world are aligned on the side of the Church. There are literally rivers of ink which are turning the wheels in the workshop of the enemy. Just what a power is being wielded by our modern ink flood—for good or bad, but mostly for bad—may be seen from the following staggering figures:

According to latest figures, about 50,000,000 newspapers are printed in the United States every day; 55,000,000 copies of weekly magazines come from the presses every week; and 95,000,000 copies of monthly magazines are circulated every month. (A total of 315,000,000 magazines a month!)

A recent survey reveals that of this imposing total 16,000,000 magazines are of the "horror" type, and 15,000,000 are of the "sex" variety, and that the bulk of these are bought by younger persons.

How many books are published annually is not definitely known, but it is known that just before the war not less than 1,100,000 tons of paper were used for the production of books each year. A visit to any corner-drug-store lending library or a perusal of any "best seller" list will not justify the hope that much of this paper was used in the interest of the Kingdom.

On the contrary, it is a regrettable fact that only a comparative trickle of the streams of ink which are being used in our country today is being used in the interest of the Church. Thus, for instance, of the tremendous total circulation of magazines in our country each month only 13,000,000 are periodicals published by the Church.

The Facts Behind These Figures

It is only natural that our people, too, have been caught in this mighty torrent of printer's ink; that they, too, are reading the almost endless stream of printed matter which is issuing from the nation's presses. If the Lutherans of America participate

proportionately in national averages also in their reading habits, they are reading well over 12,000,000 magazines a month.

Recently a Christian layman who earns his livelihood by carrying mail and whose mail route lies within the parish in which he is a consecrated leader confided to the present writer: "Pastor, if you knew the type of reading matter which I am placing into the mailboxes of *our own members* day after day, it would make your heart sick." And let us not overlook the fact that this material would not be finding its way into the homes of our members if our members were not subscribing for it — and paying for it!

Nor dare we underestimate the power which is being exerted by this avalanche of ink. If national advertisers are willing to pay as high as \$23,000 for a one-page ad in a single issue of a national magazine, surely it is because they have learned the power of the printed page to mold the thinking of the reader and to predispose him in favor of a certain course of action. And this power is not limited to the advertising section of our magazines; it is present in varying degrees of subtlety and effectiveness in news reports; editorials, cartoons, and stories. Whenever people read, they think, and no thought has ever crossed the human mind without leaving its lasting footprint.

The Challenge to the Church

No one with a lively interest in the extension and preservation of the Savior's kingdom will have pondered these facts without having come to a greater awareness both of the mighty challenge and of the immeasurable opportunity which confront our Church today in the proper stewardship of printer's ink.

The measure in which the printed page is permitted to *tear down* what we in our spiritual ministry are trying to build up, and the measure in which the power of printer's ink will be harnessed to *work together* with our Church's leaders in the building of the Kingdom, will depend in large degree upon the intelligent and consistent efforts of our pastors, teachers, and leaders to enlist the power of the Christian press in support of their daily ministrations.

To point out several ways in which this might be done is the purpose of the following paragraphs.

Beginning at the Beginning

There is no magic formula by which a man's reading habits can be changed overnight. Most Christian graces, as every pastor knows, are the result of slow and steady growth under the sanctifying power of the Word of Life. So, too, the "grace of Christian reading." It must be cultivated, and the best time to begin the cultivation process is in the years of early youth.

A children's prayer book placed into the hands of the five-year old, a Christian book given at Christmas or on birthdays or similar occasions, a Christian children's magazine coming into the home already during kindergarten years (*The Child's Companion; The Young Lutherans' Magazine; The Lutheran Guide; The Concordia Messenger;* and later *The Walther League Messenger*) will be well calculated steps in the right direction.

But merely making these materials *available* to children is not enough. They must be read. The pastor, the teacher, the Sunday school teacher, will do well to arrange for regularly recurring projects which will co-ordinate and integrate the materials printed in these periodicals with the home life and the school life of the child. Quizzes, busy work, scrapbooks, special binders for annual volumes, and other devices will be used to assure the teacher that our Church's publications for the children are actually being used.

Continuing the Process

In the upper grades the children should begin to learn that the grace of Christian reading is definitely a part of that larger grace of which the Apostle speaks when he says: "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest . . . whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report . . . *think on these things.*"

And they should begin to learn that their Church has made special arrangements for their personal cultivation of this grace. Just as we have churches, schools, and Sunday schools for them to hear the Word of Life and to be built up in their Christian faith; just as we have colleges and seminaries which prepare pastors and teachers who are to guide and train our children—*so we also have a publishing house* which day after day is preaching and teaching our children and the members of our Church by means of the printed page.

Their Bible, their Catechism, their Bible History, their hymn-book, and perhaps their readers have come from this publishing house. And after they leave school, this same publishing house will continue to print more and more books and magazines for their edification and enjoyment. Surely, they will want to read the things their Church is printing—also after graduation.

By such a gradual process, carefully and deliberately interwoven into the school life of the child, a "C. P. H. consciousness" can be inculcated already during school days, which in later years will direct the adolescent or grown person to his own publishing house for his reading needs.

Direct Contact with Their Church's Publishing House

If our young people are to place subscriptions for periodicals and are to order books from their Church's publication house after they leave school, it may be well to afford them opportunities for individual contacts with their publication house already while in the upper grades. A project in connection with the teaching of language, for instance, might be the writing of a commercial letter to their publishing house ordering a book to be used in school.

Each child in the class could be asked to order, e. g., Luecke's *Way of Life* or *Distinctive Doctrines and Customs of the Lutheran Church* or Weidenschilling's *Our Bible* or *Our Church* or one of the books in our latest mission series—to mention only a few titles suitable for this purpose. Having the mailman deliver a book to their own front door from their own publishing house will not only be a pleasant experience for them, but will show them how close they are to their source of helpful Christian literature.

Two such projects during the seventh grade and another two during the eighth grade will go far toward establishing that contact between the individual child and its lifelong source of Christian literature which will be necessary if it is to avail itself of its Church's publications in later years. It goes without saying that publications thus ordered will be assigned as collateral reading in connection with the classwork of the pupil.

The pastor, teacher, and Sunday school teacher will also do well to acquaint the children of the upper grades (and their parents) with the many books of fiction recommended by Synod's Juvenile Literature Board. These books are listed from time to time in the columns of the *Concordia Messenger* and are featured in a special section of your Concordia Publishing House Catalog. Our children are reading story books; why shouldn't they read them under the guidance of their Church and, if possible, secure them from their Church's publishing house? If they order their fiction through this channel, they will also in all probability order other current titles more closely related to their religious thought and life.

The Young People's Society

Few organizations within the congregation afford the pastor greater or more promising opportunities for cultivating in his members the grace of Christian reading than his young people's society. The young man or woman of 18 or 20 is more likely to form good reading habits under the guidance of the pastor than is the man or woman of 40 or 50 whose habits are fixed and cannot be changed without great effort.

Practical procedures for developing an interest in our young

people for their Church's literature will be outlined in greater detail under the headings "A Book of the Month Plan" and "Book Displays."

The Sermon

Perhaps we have not always conceived of the grace of Christian reading as a grace which the pastor should seek to foster from the pulpit. Just why we have referred so seldom to so important an area in the life and thought of our individual members is not clear, unless it be that we have been following sermon patterns of a day when only a small number of our listeners had either the ability or the opportunity to read. Surely, in a day when almost all of our members are reading—for better or for worse—we must give guidance and direction to their reading habits also from the pulpit. In many cases the pulpit is our only point of contact between the pastor and the member.

That the pastor will admonish and encourage his members (from the pulpit) to be faithful in their reading of the Scriptures, needs hardly to be said. That he will on occasion make reference to the regular reading of prayers from the family prayer book or the reading and singing of hymns in the family circle, is also quite evident. But these references by no means exhaust the possibilities of the sermon for the cultivation of Christian reading habits.

On any given Sunday, for instance, the vast majority of the homes in our Church have a devotional booklet lying on the kitchen table or on the family bookshelf. If our congregation has a "blanket subscription," why not an occasional reference in the sermon such as: "As we all read in our devotional booklets last Thursday . . ."? Surely, so important a matter as the devotional life of our members deserves frequent mention from the pulpit, and if we are using Synod's booklets as an aid to the maintenance of the family altar in our congregation, we might profitably weave a reference to them into our sermons whenever the occasion permits.

Nor does this exhaust the possibilities. Perhaps you are preaching on the trustworthiness of Scripture. Why not a reference to Dr. Dallmann's *Why do I Believe the Bible Is God's Word?* or to Dr. Arndt's *Does the Bible Contradict Itself?* and similar titles? Or you are preaching on the Scriptural account of Creation or the Christian world view based on that account. You do not have the opportunity to deal exhaustively with all the points involved. Why not a reference to *Every-Day Science for the Christian*, by Handrich, or to Dr. Graebner's books on evolution or, if your congregation includes professional men, Dr. Graebner's *God and the Cosmos*?

Similarly, in a sermon on the parables, reference could be

made to Dr. Dallmann's *Short Stories by Jesus*. In a sermon on courtship and marriage and the Christian home members could be referred to certain statements in Dr. Maier's *For Better, Not for Worse*. A sermon on personal evangelism could contain a reference to *The Approach to the Unchurched*, by Rev. Philip Lange, while a sermon on our Church's mission program could very appropriately include a reference to the four books of Synod's new mission series. A Reformation Day sermon may allude to such books as *The Story of Luther*, by Dr. Polack. A sermon on the Franconian settlement could well suggest the reading of *Church Bells in the Forest*, by Dr. Th. Graebner.

Nor need such references always be direct exhortations to read a certain book. "As I was reading last week in *The Stewardship Life*, by Rev. K. Kretschmar, a book by the way, which I consider one of the very best on the subject . . ." may be all that is necessary to stimulate interest in the minds of several of your listeners. Perhaps later in the week you will be cheered by the question "What was that book you referred to in your sermon last Sunday, Pastor?"

Reference may also be made in the pulpit to good books from other circles, provided the pastor has read them and can recommend them. As our own Church produces more and more books of general interest to the laity, the pastor's task in this respect will be greatly lightened.

It need hardly be stated that when the pastor mentions specific titles from the pulpit, he will do so not in the spirit of a book salesman but as a shepherd of the flock over whose reading habits the Holy Ghost has made him overseer.

The Private Cure of Souls

The pastor's daily contacts with his members provide numerous opportunities for leading the sheep and the lambs entrusted to his care to the green pastures of good reading. The sick and the shut-in will thank him for bringing to their attention such edifying and refreshing books as Pastor Doerfler's *The Burden Made Light* and *The Yoke Made Easy*, or Pastor Rein's *Cross and Affliction*.

Parents of adolescents will welcome the suggestion that they purchase a specific book or booklet on the facts of life presented from the Christian point of view. Young people and newlyweds will be glad to have their attention called to specific chapters in Dr. Maier's *For Better, Not for Worse* or to other books which treat of marriage in the light of Scripture. Doubters and those of weak faith will frequently read with the greatest avidity any book on fundamental Christian doctrine which the pastor might recommend.

The opportunities are almost numberless. The pastor needs only to remain (or to become?) conscious of them and to be ready with specific recommendations whenever the occasion arises.

Church Papers

The Lutheran Witness now goes into approximately 220,000 homes of our Church. *The Walther League Messenger* has a subscription list of some 60,000. What a potential source of spiritual light and power! In addition, there is *Der Lutheraner*; *The Concordia Messenger*; *The Cresset*; *The American Lutheran*; and the several magazines for children. The extent to which these periodicals are read in any congregation will depend largely upon how the pastor and the teachers weave these papers into the consciousness of the members.

Some pastors have been known to take a copy of *The Lutheran Witness* into the pulpit to read a certain editorial or article. Others make a habit of referring to items of interest in current periodicals when these have a bearing on the subject of their sermon. Such repeated references are necessary if our papers are to have a maximum reader audience and are to exert a maximum influence.

Meetings of the ladies' aid, the men's club, and the young people's society afford splendid opportunities for the pastor to make frequent reference to our Church's periodicals. The report of a missionary journey appearing in *The Lutheran Witness* or an article on mixed marriages in *The Walther League Messenger* will be listened to with interest and will evoke a lively discussion. When members know that their church papers are going to be discussed at meetings, they will want to have read them *before* the meeting — if for no other reason, then at least for the satisfaction of being able to say that they are "up" on their reading.

A Publications Sunday?

While we are well aware of the nuisance of cluttering up the church calendar with special Sundays, we do believe that many of our congregations would benefit by a Publications Sunday perhaps once a year — early in October, when the annual trek "back home" begins and more intensive reading habits are resumed. In such a service the pastor could give his congregation a comprehensive overview of the publication activities of our Church, could enlarge upon the benefits which accrue to the individual from Christian reading habits, and could outline a balanced reading diet for the coming winter months. We believe that an occasional service of this nature would do much toward cultivating a more general participation in the grace of Christian reading.

A "Book of the Month" Plan

As long as a church body with an adult membership of a million members continues to publish its books for the laity in total editions of from 3,000 to 5,000—and the majority of these are purchased by the clergy—there will be need for a systematic program of acquainting our lay members with the religious books which their Church is publishing.

We share the general aversion to plans and programs which do nothing but clutter up the pastor's busy schedule with cumbersome machinery. The "book of the month" plan which we are about to outline calls for no such bothersome machinery and has already been used by some of our pastors with conspicuous success. The plan is briefly this:

The pastor chooses a title from his Concordia Publishing House Catalog which will be of interest to his people and designates it as his "book of the month." This is the volume which he intends to get into as many homes as possible during the coming month. Any number of helpful books for the laity immediately suggest themselves: *The Way of Life; Distinctive Doctrines; Our Bible; Our Church; Bible Difficulties; Does the Bible Contradict Itself? The Building of a Great Church; The Borderland of Right and Wrong; The World Today; For Better, Not for Worse; Concordia New Testament with Notes; Concordia Cyclopedia; Lutheran Book of Prayer; The Stewardship Life; Short Stories by Jesus; Lutheran Confessional Theology; The Yoke Made Easy; The Burden Made Light; Church Bells in the Forest; Eighty Eventful Years;* and others.

Having selected his book, the pastor decides on the avenues of approach through which he is going to bring it to the attention of his members. A number of possibilities present themselves at once. First, there is the Sunday bulletin. In small congregations a good portion of the bulletin can be devoted to a brief book review the first Sunday of each month, followed by reminder paragraphs on one or two succeeding Sundays.

During the course of a month a pastor is called upon to attend and perhaps address a goodly number of meetings within the congregation. Choosing topics for these short talks is not always a simple matter. A book review of his "book of the month" will be in place whether he is addressing the voters, the men's club, the ladies' aid, the Sunday school teachers, or the Walther League society. This feature should appeal particularly to the busy pastor who is hard put for topics for these occasional addresses.

Book Displays

The desirability of having religious books, including the "book of the month," on display is quite evident. In the narthex of the church, in the school, or in the parish hall a counter or a showcase stocked with wholesome Christian literature to be purchased by the members of the congregation will often prove an invaluable means of getting the Church's publications into the homes of the people.

In addition to achieving its primary purpose such a display will afford the added advantage of occupying the time of an alert and energetic church society with a very worth-while project. Men's clubs, ladies' aids, and young people's groups could find few undertakings more purposeful or more profitable in spiritual dividends for themselves and for the congregation. Concordia Publishing House has evolved a very practical plan for the handling of such book displays, the details of which are available upon request.

Church and School Libraries

While there have been a few encouraging exceptions, the general experience of those who have tried to build up church or school libraries has been somewhat negative. The congregation, it would seem, does not occupy a position sufficiently close to the center of the average member's life to induce him to come to the school or parish hall to do his reading or to secure his books. The fact that the library idea is not feasible in many of our congregations, however, does not justify the assumption that it is not feasible in any. No doubt, there could be many more "encouraging exceptions."

Especially desirable is a centrally located library of helps for Bible class leaders, Sunday school teachers, and other lay workers in the church. Bibles, commentaries, Bible helps, reference works, teaching aids, books on missions, books on stewardship, church finance, and church administration — all will fill an important place and serve a very useful purpose if gathered into a central place and made available to the consecrated workers of the congregation. The service department of Concordia Publishing House will be happy to furnish our pastors with suggestions for various types of libraries.

A Catalog of Christian Books for Christian Homes

During the past year Concordia Publishing House has issued its first sizable Home Catalog, which it offered to send free of charge to all lay readers of our Church's periodicals. As a result of this offer more than 18,000 catalogs were sent into the homes of our members within the brief space of several months. These

names have been kept on file, and a special lay mailing list has been compiled. This list will continue to be built up from month to month—and will be subject to a constant process of “weeding out” on the basis of orders placed from year to year.

Every pastor who has members of whom he believes that they give good promise of purchasing and reading our Church's literature is invited to send their names to Concordia Publishing House for inclusion in the Home Catalog mailing list. (Present catalog paper limitations counsel caution in making the above offer. But with the coming of peace the Concordia Home Catalog should become a constant fixture in many more thousands of Christian homes.) The pastor who is eager to increase the dissemination of wholesome literature among his members will do well to work toward an ever greater coverage of the Concordia Home Catalog among his membership.

Conclusion

“All that mankind has done, thought, gained, or been, is lying as in magic preservation in the pages of books,” says Thomas Carlyle. Paraphrased, amplified, and applied to the history of God's people, this sentence might be changed to read: All that God has done for the redemption, the preservation, and the eternal happiness of man is lying as in magic preservation in the pages of books. It is for us, the leaders of God's people, to bring these pages, charged with the life-giving power of the Word of Life, into more constant and more vital contact with the lives of the members entrusted to our care. It is for us to bring pages and people together.

“Write the things which thou hast seen,” was the Lord's command to John as he stood on the isle of Patmos and saw “the things which are and the things which shall be hereafter.” Throughout the centuries that followed, and to the present day, Spirit-enlightened men of God have been writing the things which they have seen in the limitless treasure house of His Word. And they have written these things for the one purpose of sharing their rich treasures with others.

We who are leaders in the Church have the privilege of bringing to the attention of our members the priceless heritage which the Lord of the Church has showered, and still is showering, upon His people through the ministry of print. May we always be aware of this privilege and alive to the precious opportunities which it presents.

St. Louis, Mo.

H. W. GOCKEL

