The Ministry of Writing

In a recent address before a group of writers I made the statement: "The need for qualified Christian journalists in the ministry of writing becomes increasingly significant." At the close of the talk a free-lance writer whose widely-read articles appear in national magazines arose and blustered: "I challenge that religious ballyhoo. What, after all, is the difference between journalism and Christian journalism?"

Journalism is a comprehensive term applied to the communication of news and views. Christian journalism goes further. Its single purpose is to communicate as accurately as possible ideas and attitudes based on the precepts of the gospel.

The celebrated English author Thomas De Quinney stated that he found the key to effective writing by making a sharp distinction between the literature of information and the literature of power. The former may teach. But the latter can motivate the inner yearnings of man. The Christian journalist strives to do both. With this two-fold objective he writes with facts and feelings seeking to present without compromise not only news and views but values as affirmed in God's Word.

Through the magic of the printed word the Christian journalist attempts to transfer his ideas and feelings into the minds and hearts of his readers. Magic? Yes. That thin film of ink, less than .00025 of an inch spread over type on a sheet of paper can bring courage and conviction.

In the pressures of an atomic age the Christian journalist tries to do this by making the gospel relevant for the ever-enlarging number of persons who search for answers to the deepest needs of the human heart. They long for something more than factual answers to their problems of pain and grief. The Christian journalist can write with the same singular purpose of Paul, the chief reporter and staff writer representing the church fathers nearly twenty centuries ago. And if the Christian journalist of today has offered his life in obedience to Christ and intimately experienced his power and sought his wisdom and compassion, then with dedicated skill in this ministry of writing he can communicate ideas that have power not only to change lives but conditions in the times in which we live.

But dedication is not enough. To help accomplish this goal there must also be training. And here I propose the establishment of a course in Christian Journalism to be offered in theological seminaries. Such a course in creative writing could stimulate and train the pastor. From the mediocre manuscripts editors regularly receive from pastors it is obvious that many ministers could do with improvement in the disciplines of literary craftsmanship. A shocking number of ministers have not yet recognized that their Sunday sermons are not articles suitable for publication. Encouraged by the typical "I-enjoyed-your-sermon-so much" flattery, the pastor is sufficiently bolstered to mail his sermonic masterpiece to an editor without the faintest trace of revision. Sermons depend upon the ear, not the eye; they are

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designed to be heard, not read. The article must therefore be made succinct and adapted to proper standards of style and form.

Notwithstanding the Christian journalist's professional qualifications his influence on public opinion steadily grows. With the phenomenal deluge of smut magazines and paperbacks the Christian journalist is the most effective force in protecting and advancing the social and spiritual well-being of the community.

This force continues to be felt as long as the Christian journalist looks to what he considers the truth as supremely revealed in God's Word and writes without compromise. Such writing may not bring praise but it will bring the satisfaction of honestly pursuing the ministry of writing. And, perhaps a few words of radium out of the tons and tons of lead type may give fresh hope and healing. So significant is the ministry of writing—so strong the power of the printed page that frequently it becomes our challenge in despair. Against such a realistic background the future of Christian journalism has more potential than any words of mine can describe.

The Christian journalist never forgets that as a reporter he presents a message firmly grounded in the Bible, and that often what he writes is not actually new, but has always existed in him who is Lord of all and only now is being discovered. Through writing that reveals concern for men the perceptive Christian journalist can reach the world for Christ.

Over my desk I have written the following prayer, daily reminding me of my task in the ministry of writing:

O Lord, as I begin this day, help me to use wisely the mighty power of words.
Help me to express fragments of Thy wisdom, truth and love through the amazing force of words.
Teach me to temper the words I use from Thy living Word, so that I may reach the lonely and those who sorrow with the power of the printed page.
In the pursuit of truth, let me dare write with the courage that defies compromise.
Enable me to report honestly the harder right, rather than the easier wrong.
Give me a sense of fairness that I may seek to understand those whose views are different from mine. Keep me from quick and shallow judgments.
Make me sensitive to the beauty hidden in the common things, the freshness of new experiences and trust in my fellow man.
Through the simplicity of words, give me, O Lord, the freedom to write, that I may express Thy will.

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