

Christian Writing for our Times

By
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(An address delivered not long before his death to an IPHC conference for writers.)

“And the children of Isachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do . . .” (I Chronicles 12:32)

The most precious and priceless legacy of this generation is the accumulated writings of all of the past ages.

This nation could more easily survive in the sudden loss of all of its natural resources and modern achievements than it could if it was suddenly deprived of all written matter that line the shelves of our public and private libraries.

The true image of every generation has been engraved on the pages of time more emphatically by the pen than by the sword, or any military might. The writings of every era reflect the moral and spiritual image and standard of each generation more than any other landmark.

When we speak, we may do so with a certain abandon, recklessness, and carelessness because we have the feeling that always if we are called to task, we figure that we can explain it away or wiggle out of it by saying we were misunderstood. This is not true when we write.

We accuse Pontius Pilate of being cravenly coward, but after being pressed to change the inscription that he had scrawled upon the cross of Christ, he had the courage to say: "What I have written I have written" (John 19:22). (Editor's note: At this point Rev. Robinson digressed and told a story about a preacher who asked the members of his church who were always critical of the pastor to write down their complaints and sign them. The complete story and its source are unknown.)

In the memorable trial of the illustrious Martin Luther, he was asked if he could identify a selection of booklets and pamphlets ascribed to his pen. Without hesitancy, he claimed his manuscripts and had the nerve to defend what he had written with his life.

He had dared to become a radical non-conformist with his pen. And thereby, set the world ablaze with the fires of the Reformation. How worthy of our consideration is it that the most controversial document of all times was written by the finger of God himself among the thundering heights of Sinai when he inscribed upon the two tablets of stone the great Magna Carta of the moral law.

It is not without special note that Jesus never left any message on any parchment. The only writing ascribed to his hand was the few words that He traced in the sand. This

act cannot be construed to indicate his attitude toward writing, as we learn repeatedly from other of his divine directives.

Someone has said that the secret ambition of every preacher is to write at least one book before he dies. In most cases, it should be the other way around. In no other phase of the Gospel ministry is the responsibility more acute and pointed than in the field of Christian writing.

The text that I read is both timely and timeless. It sets forth in simple language possibly the basic qualification of a Christian writer (other things being equal). They should be men who have an understanding of the times and know what men ought to do.

A writer should take pen in hand with the same awe that must have gripped the apostle John when the Lord said unto him: "Write" (Revelation 2 and 3). He was directed to write at least three things in the book of Revelation:

- The things that you have seen.
- The things that are.
- The things that shall be hereafter.

How full of significance are those immortal repetitions of Jesus in his unerring dictations to John on the Isle of Patmos when he said:

- Unto the church at Ephesus – write.
- Unto the church of Smyrna – write.
- Unto the church of Pergumus – write.

On and on he went seven times, to the seven churches, to seven eras, to the end of the age. His repeated command was to write, write, write. In the unfolding of the panoramic pictures of the end-time, the more tragic and confused the times became, the more emphatic was the divine command to write.

And when the limitations of mortality brought an end to the writing of John, we see God himself dipping His pen in the ink wells of immortal glory writing, writing. Writing new names, new honors, new tributes in the hearts of his saints to last through the ceaseless ages.

I call to mind possibly the most important written statement on record which I think is most fittingly applied at this time: "For the prophesy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake (or wrote) as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21).

At no other time in history has the need been greater, the demand more thunderous, the appeal more intense and the opportunity more challenging for Christian writers to speak out in clear-cut directives to show to men what they ought to do.

I know that there are certain unwritten principles of Christian ethics that should guide the pen of every writer along certain lines and latitudes, the breaching of which is

considered to be out of bounds. But I would like for this panel to express for us tonight to what extent they think Christian writers should be governed and circumscribed by the usual pattern and the generally accepted rules.

The following are questions or suggested discussion topics for not only our panel, but for all Christian writers everywhere:

- To what extent should contemporary trends in our society color and affect our writings?
- Evaluate the opportunity for evangelism through the printed page and list some of the possibilities of propagating the evangelistic message through writing.
- How far should a writer go in denouncing the trends of error and evil, keeping before the public the Christian concepts and standards set forth in the teachings of Jesus Christ to counteract the trends they infringe upon the sacred position of the church in the world?
- Should a Christian writer analyze political developments in the light of Scripture and the responsibility of the Church in our times?
- How much consideration and to what extent should a writer take into account his reading audience?
- In highly controversial issues, how far should an editor or writer go in pointing out what he believes to be right and proper?
- How much of a writer's personal convictions and own beliefs should enter into his manuscripts?
- Can the position or idea of being objective in all Christian writings destroy the effectiveness and usefulness of a writer?
- Describe what to you is the most rewarding aspect of writing.
- Point out the opportunities and challenges in the field of Christian writing that you would consider appealing to ambitious young people.