



Cheryl Kirk-Duggan is a professor and scholar at Shaw University Divinity School in Raleigh, North Carolina. She is in her second year as Chair of AAR's Publication Committee and serves on the AAR Board of Directors.

Persons who engage in the study and practice of religion greatly rely on texts. Some read for inspiration; others read to explore new ideas. Some wrestle philosophically; others mine the essence of humanity, and explore why they do what they do from a religious perspective. Authors write fiction, novels mindful of their faith context; others engage nonfiction, from theological treatises, philosophical tomes, and dissertations to trade books, including self-help volumes, books on rituals and celebrations, and issues of faith community organizing and nonprofit work. Some publish with well-established presses (university, academic, and denominational presses), some with publishing houses that have large production lists each season, including religion, and still others with presses that fill a distinctive niche. Over the last decade more authors have launched into self-publishing. Thanks to Gutenberg's historic improvements creating a printing press with movable type and technological advances including the Internet, websites, PDFs, Kindle, smartphones, and blogs, we not only have access to the texts themselves, but what it means to publish has expanded greatly, notwithstanding global economic downturns from the dotcom bust, mortgage foreclosure fiascos, and Ponzi schemes — à la Bernard Madoff and Alan Stanford — that affect cash flow and discretionary spending. There are selected issues around publishing in religion: e-publishing, economics, the popularity of the Bible, academic and popular publishing, and publishing awards.

E-publishing

Some publishers are simultaneously releasing most of their new titles as e-books and as print volumes, and are selling many of their backlist titles in e-book form. Publishers want to capitalize on a book market projected to grow \$4 billion by the year 2013 to a total of \$27 billion. Publishers such as Oxford University Press know that now is the time to prepare by exploring e-publishing opportunities and strategies. Methodology, scope, and focus in producing e-books are not uniform. Publishing houses are experimenting with how to market and increase sales. One place that proves challenging is how to deal with embedded content and multimedia in

e-books. The mode of publishing affects a publishing house's economic profile and marketing strategies, and has a direct impact on scholarship and promotion. If one is coming up for tenure review, will an e-book count like a text in hard copy form? Will a peer-reviewed article published in an e-journal be taken as seriously as a peer-reviewed article in a print journal? Answers for many such questions are still in formation. Just as crimes like cyber-bullying, hacking, and identity theft have grown and lawmakers have had to scurry to produce responsive legislation, key questions remain unanswered for the religion publishing industry.

Economics

Despite the global economic downturn that dampened the publishing business a few years ago, recent months have seen some growth. Large independent bookstores, including several religion-specialty retailers with annual sales of more than \$2 million, saw a slight increase in sales in the summer of 2010. While slight, that increase still moves religion book sales in the right direction. Like other retailers, the business of religion book sales involves book shows and conferences where convention attendance includes retailers, exhibitors, professionals, scholars, and students, global and domestic. The peak year for the International Christian Retail Show was 1999, with 15,000 attendees.

Two main issues affect the market: how long books stay in print and their availability. Professors change books often; there is a growing used textbook and Internet book market, and many professors do not use textbooks for classes. When I cannot find a substantive introductory text, I look for chapters from various books, rely on the media of film and music, and search online for journal articles. The ATLA database through EBSCO is of monumental importance. When I develop new courses, revise old ones, and embark on a new research project, I search online to find the latest available materials. When books do not sell, publishers reduce numbers of texts produced for each list. Having a strong backlist helps to foster sales. Conversely, textbook rental programs, used book sales, Internet sales, and print-on-demand technology affect sales, so developing new core textbooks and revising old standards are essential. Some believe the academic publishing industry will be in flux for a while, as stakeholders realize how to utilize the possibilities and challenges around producing and distributing information.

Bible Popularity

In a world where culture and language evolve, the Bible continues to outsell all other books. There is an ongoing need for new translations, commentaries, and other texts to help make ancient texts accessible to everyday readers. Technical books regarding biblical history, interpretation, and translation are in demand, along with volumes on biblical understandings of creation, human relationships, leadership, sex, the problem of evil, God, and human suffering. Publishers and people pay attention to the Bible and related events. May 5, 2011, marks the 400th anniversary of the King James English translation of the Bible, which is considered by

many to have been the most influential shaper of English language, literature, and culture. Several publishers and many institutions of higher education are thus launching celebrations commemorating this important date.

Academic and Popular Religion Writing

For potential authors, just having a good idea may not result in a book contract. An author needs to be perceptive and think about marketing and publishing trends as well as an audience. Perusal of various publishing house book lists will reveal numerous topically related volumes in individual and encyclopedic sets. Matters of identity and context, interdisciplinary studies, globalization, service learning, and sustainability are critical in religion publishing. There is a need for study guides and textbooks. Spirituality and the classics continue to sell well. Religion publishing must reckon with the growth of online education.

Popular religious authors also continue to make their marks. San Antonio, Texas-based minister Max Lucado has seventy-five titles in print with 65 million books sold. He publishes three works a year based around questions people ask: one nonfiction trade title, one children's or devotional book, and a product developed from a previous work. Lucado told *RBL* that the biggest difference he has seen is that Christian publishers prioritize developing the brand of an author over publishing the book. Numerous self-help books like

The Purpose Driven Life

and

Prayer of Jabez

are cottage industries unto themselves. Several publishers now list Manga (Japanese graphic illustrated novel) Bibles. Appearances on

The Daily Show

,

Oprah

, or

The Colbert Report

further fuel book sales. Some publishers now require prospective authors have an agent in order to get a hearing.

Writing and Writing Awards

The Christy Awards, established in 1999, focus on excellence in contemporary Christian fiction in a variety of categories including first novel, romance, and suspense. The Grawemeyer Award honors significant creative and constructive insight contributions to religious and spiritual understanding; that is, the experiences, feelings, and acts of humanity as they ponder the divine, toward wholeness and integrity. Anyone care to write a new book?

