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A STUDY OF MODERN WRITING TECHNIQUES APPLICABLE
TO CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

by

BARBARA SUE NICHOLS

B.A., University of Pittsburgh

A Thesis

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INTRODUCTION

A STUDY OF MODERN WRITING TECHNIQUES APPLICABLE TO CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

A. The Problem Stated and Justified

That Christianity furnishes the Christian worker with adequate content for his messages is attested to by the countless sermons and books which have derived from the faith. That the needs, pressures, and expectations of his congregation furnish the worker with clues as to which portion of the content to stress is clear in most historical studies of Christianity. That the worker is urged to present the content in the best manner possible is evident in Proverbs 25:11:

A word fitly spoken
is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.

The Christian message ought to be written and spoken in terms so fitting for today that it will appear appropriate and relevant to its environment. And the Christian worker ought to be looking for processes of presentation which are winsome to his audience.

As a part of the search for such processes, this thesis poses the question: can modern writing techniques

be applied to Christian messages in order to make them more readily acceptable to people living in twentieth century America?

B. The Problem Delimited

The thesis will define what is acceptable in terms of what is popular. Little will be said about the psychological or philosophical reasons for the popularity of the material so designated. The authors in the field of writing offer such varied explanations that to consider the "why?" would involve a study in itself.

The techniques presented will be those deemed most helpful in producing writing characteristic of popular fiction in the modern age (1900-1955). They will not include all the rules for good writing. Techniques which give writing characteristics like clarity and coherence will not be discussed, because such characteristics are not uniquely twentieth century.

C. The Method of Procedure

The thesis will seek to establish what characteristics or qualities of writing are distinctly modern. It will set forth, then, the techniques which modern writers use to produce these qualities in their writing. In order to point out the techniques more sharply, sample passages from popular books prior to the Modern Age will be contrasted with selected popular books since then. The final chapter

will examine a book of the Bible and several modern Christian works of non-fiction which have had commendable sales records to determine whether these techniques were used in them and in what way.

CHAPTER ONE
DISTINCTIVE QUALITIES OF POPULAR WRITING
IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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DISTINCTIVE QUALITIES OF POPULAR WRITING IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

A. Introduction

In seeking to establish what qualities are peculiar to twentieth century writing, the writer of this thesis does not claim that these qualities have never appeared in writing prior to the modern age. Indeed, in the final chapter, attention will be given to material (the Book of Mark) written in a quite ancient age, the first century. The writer wishes to show, rather, that the qualities have become so popular in our day that writing which incorporates them has a better chance of being received favorably than writing which omits or ignores them.

B. Definition of Popularity

The term popularity connotes the thought of that which draws interest to itself because it is appealing. Such a connotation need not be divorced from the term as used in the material to follow, even though it is narrowed here to mean "the sought after." For, the narrowing of the term signifies merely that interest and appeal must be measured in terms of what results they produce. In libraries, the most popular volumes are espied by their

dog-eared pages; in the world at large, the popular are the books that sell. Therefore, the works of fiction designated as popular in this thesis will be those which, in their day, were bestsellers.

Five of the six will have been selected from the listings in Alice Payne Hackett's study entitled, Fifty Years of Best Sellers 1895-1945. This is a standard reference book on the subject. Its listings from 1895 to 1911 are based on "The Bookman's" monthly reports; its listings from 1912 to 1945 are based on "The Publisher's Weekly" and "Books of the Month" (now "Bowker Book Guides") reports.

The information which this book offers regarding what novels were popular prior to 1880 will be stated as well.¹ Such information is not nearly so easy to obtain. Before 1880, the American publishing industry did not keep records of its sales and make their statistics available to house organs of the publishing trade, as they do today.

The sixth book selected will be one of the latest best-sellers, Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea. It was so popular that it ran serially in "Life" magazine during its publication year, 1952. "Life" enjoys a high American circulation. Some 5,600,000 copies of this picture magazine are purchased in America each week.

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1. Alice Payne Hackett: Fifty Years of Best Sellers 1895-1945, p. 131.

All six of the books will be works of recognized quality, as well as being bestsellers, and their titles will not be unfamiliar to those acquainted with the history of the novel.

C. Popularity and Contemporariness

A comparison of the books on the bestseller lists with the publication dates of those books reveals that a very high per centage, usually nine-tenths, of them were published the year they became bestsellers. All of the books on the lists could be called new in that they were published within four or five years of the year of list.

In Hackett's study, for example, only fifteen of the possible one hundred books listed as bestsellers between the years 1934-1944 (ten books for each of the ten years) appeared on the list two years in suceession. Only one appeared on the lists for three years. No books maintained the bestseller rating over a four year period, and no books regained their popularity after dropping from the list.¹

George Woods, bestseller list editor of "The New York Times" says:

It seems self-evident that the books people are walking into the bookstores and buying are the ones which have just come on the market. The oldest book on the bestseller list this week is Norman Vincent Peale's The Power of Positive

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1. Hackett, op. cit., pp. 69-91

Thinking. It's been on the list for one hundred and eleven weeks, almost since its issuance in 1952. But it is certainly the exception; all the other books are very recent.

The staff of "The New York Times" computes the popularity of a book in terms of weeks, so new are the books which make up their statistics.

"A book seldom sells well after the first season."¹ laments Robert Sterling Yard. Tomes from the past do not hold the same interest for the reading public as do the works of today. Henry Mills Alden, prominent literary critic at the turn of the century, denies the appeal of the old in these words:

Yet we would not call back into being these prehistoric wonders or those of the Homeric renaissance - not those, indeed, of any age preceding our own - for our immediate delectation... We would not welcome Spenser's Faerie Queene as a poem of today. Plato's Republic or Sir Philip Sidney's Apologie for Poetry or his Arcadia would fall upon dull ears for any present appeal. Scott's romances, widely as they are read, for the romantic interest that endures, would be no more welcome as present productions than Milton's epics or Sir Thomas Browne's Religio Medici. All the great works of the past which we delight in as past would as works of today encounter resentment, as things born out of their time.²

D. The Role of Qualities in Popularity

in ascertaining why new books are the bestsellers in

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1. Robert Sterling Yard: The Publisher, p. 48
2. Henry Mills Alden: Magazine Writing and the New Literature, p. 138, 139, 140

any particular age, three possibilities offer themselves. Books may be popular because of their fresh content, or because of their fresh style of presentation or because of a combination of both.

That content plays a role is confirmed by Alden in his statement, "...in the new fiction it is the world of today and the mind of today that furnish its most interesting material.." ¹

That the method of presentation generates interest, he affirms in the lines:

imaginative values are everlasting, but every age has its own form and costume which seem alien to another, and are only tolerated out of their time because of the essential excellence which they invest. ²

He goes on to elaborate that works of the past are attractive when reproduced because of their novelty and picturesqueness, "but we would not suffer them in the familiar intercourse of everyday life." ³

Something of the interdependence of content and method of presentation he offers in a figure:

in the garden which we tend, every living thing springs up spontaneously...but both the garden and our sensibilities answer to our tillage and culture. ⁴

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1. Alden, op. cit., p. 199
2. Ibid., p. 139
3. Ibid., p. 140
4. Ibid., p. 165

This thesis will not deal with the question of which one of the three possibilities creates a better potential for popularity. It will center attention on the second possibility: the method of presentation. The writer assumes that the one who wishes to communicate the content of the Christian faith knows the content or knows of sufficient sources to obtain it.

This study will focus on the manner in which he presents that content. The strong terms which Alden¹ used when speaking of outdated presentations, namely, "encounter resentment," "are only tolerated," and "we would not suffer," bespeak the necessity of Christians using modern methods when writing for or speaking to a twentieth century audience. Ministers, teachers, and writers need to know modern writing techniques to help them make appealing presentations.

Quite obviously, techniques of writing give writing its qualities. The technique of writing short sentences gives the quality of brevity; the technique of changing the sentence structure gives variety. The immediate objective of this study is to discover the qualities exhibited by modern writing; an eventual objective is to discover what techniques produce them.

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1. Ante. pp. 3 and 4 respectively.

E. Discovering the Distinctive Qualities in Modern Writing

Popular writing underwent a decided change at the beginning of the twentieth century. The major works of literary history¹ devote space to America's emergence from a period labelled variously as Victorian, Idealistic or Romantic into a period of Realism. Many reasons, from the rise to prominence of the descriptive sciences after 1900 to the increased tempo of life, are offered to account for the change. But whatever the cause or causes for it, writers, at about this time, cast off the fictional forms of their predecessors and took up new techniques.

Joseph Warren Beach, in his study of novel techniques, tells of "...three major tendencies of the Victorian novel which have, for good or ill, gone largely out of fashion in the twentieth century."² Indeed, throughout his entire second chapter, "Exit Author", he repeats the phrase "out of fashion" in referring to the old novelists Scott, Thackeray, Trollope and Meredith; and speaks of D. H. Lawrence as "characteristic of our time."³ Beach's book was written in 1932.

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1. cf. The Cambridge History of American Literature, Vol. III. Ludwig Lewisohn: Story of American Literature, Book Eight.
Vernon Louis Parrington: Main Currents in American Thought An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920, Vol. III.
2. Joseph Warren Beach: The Twentieth Century Novel Studies in Technique, p. 20.
3. Ibid., pp. 16, 23.

New fiction, written and published since 1900, then, has distinctive qualities which make it acceptable and characteristic of our time.

In trying to discover its distinctive qualities, the observations of Henry Mills Alden and J. Donald Adams prove helpful. These two authors not only enjoy literary prestige, but also write from certain vantage points in time which enable us to fix the qualities to the Modern Age.

1. The Literary and Temporal Significance of These Authors

Henry Mills Alden served as editor of Harper's Magazine for half a century. With William Dean Howells, eminent American critic,¹ he was joint editor of Life at High Tide, Shapes that Haunt the Dust, Under the Sunset and others. From 1910 until his death in 1919, he was a member of the Academy of Arts and Letters.

Alden watched the launching of modern writing, in 1908, he wrote Magazine Writing and the New Literature, in which he set forth the characteristics or qualities of recent fiction as seen, at that early date, to a greater extent in magazine writing than in books.

J. Donald Adams was editor of "The New York Times Book Review" in 1924 and 1925. He has served as contributing

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1. Carl Van Doren says of Howells in The American Novel, 1789-1939: "...as an editor and critic (he is) so influential that he amounts almost to a literary movement."

editor to the "Review" since 1943. In 1945 and 1946, he presided over the American Poetry Association, and he has written three books on literature.

Adams lives in the Age of Modern Writing and longs to launch a new era. In his 1948 work, he looks back over the major novels since the turn of the century. He finds that the qualities which Alden extolled as "new" in 1908 prevail in all these works. Nor does he decry the qualities, but merely pleads for additional ones. However, the important point is that both he and Alden outline essentially the same qualities as characteristic of modern writing.

2. Statement of the Qualities by Alden

Writing with the enthusiasm of one who revels in the new movement, Alden describes the scene in 1908 in excited fashion:

We are quickly receptive of those impressions which are direct and vital, and have tempted writers to meet us on this ground - to break up old forms, to give up old affectations and mannerisms, and, while keeping and even multiplying the veils of art and the illusions of romance, to dispense with masquerade. We invite a more spontaneous and less ornate speech and a less sententious criticism. Our most esteemed writers have more real simplicity than Addison, whose elegances, natural for his time, would repel us as artificial.¹

Modern writing, says Alden, is direct, vital, unaffected, veiled and simple. At another point in his book, he commends it as follows:

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1. Alden, op. cit., p. 141

Literature,...rejecting the unreal, has become homely of feature, with homelike sympathies, graces and charms, and at the same time more subtle and wonderful in its disclosure of the deep truths of life than it ever was in its detachment from life or in its reflection of a life which had not found its true center...and was therefore...wearing all sorts of illusive and monstrous disguises.¹

And he concludes: "Imaginative literature in its new forms ...comes nearer to life - a spontaneous communication, as frank, intimate and pervasive as the sunlight."²

3. Statement of the Qualities by Adams

Adams, conscious that he is not writing of something entirely new, devotes few words to elaborating on the qualities of modern writing. In four brief sentences, he establishes that qualities similar to those stated by Alden prevailed throughout the first half of the twentieth century:

Naturalism...trickled into American writing as the nineteenth century was coming to an end. Naturalism as conscious literary movement in America properly begins with the early work of Stephen Crane.³

...Crane did not sentimentalize, nor did he moralize; he told his tale in simple, stark severity.⁴ Within the decade we have seen naturalism, in the form of photographic realism, arrive at its dead-end in our fiction.⁵

The last sentence might lead one to think that Adams favors the abolition of the qualities of restraint, simplicity

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1. Alden, op. cit., p. 165.

2. Ibid., p. 264.

3. J. Donald Adams: The Shape of Books to Come, p. 47.

4. Ibid., p. 48.

5. Ibid., p. xiv.

and severity, but such is not the case. A closer examination of his theme reveals that it is a plea for better content, not altered presentation.¹

Adams continues this description of modern writing by speaking of it as a faithful depiction of a person or people, as "exact observation of the logical connection of facts."²

4. Statement of the Qualities by Others

While other authors may shift the period of the beginning of the Modern Age a year or so or pick out novelists other than Crane as the initiator, they agree generally about the qualities.

In his tracing of the history of the novel, Carl Van Doren describes the first American novel called realistic in the modern sense (Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Se-
cession to Loyalty by John W. DeForest published 1867) as follows:

Coldly truthful in its descriptions of battles
and camps, crisp and pointed in its dialogue,

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1. He says, on page 11 of the same work: Our books have been crammed with observation, packed with fact, loaded, often, with opinion. But that is not what I have in mind when I find them so often vital but thin, stimulating but not illuminating. I mean the absence of fruitful reflection on the life which they report. It is the kind of quality which makes a writer like Antoine de Saint-Exupery so refreshing among our contemporaries. He is a good reporter, too, and has written more vividly of flight than anyone save Anne Lindbergh..
2. Ibid., p. 4

penetrating, if not oversubtle, in its character analysis, sensible in its plot and in its general temper, it is still almost as convincing as it was once precocious.¹

Arthur Quinn sets the beginning of the Age of Realism a little earlier in this sentence:

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the American novelists were beginning to turn from the heroic to the material of familiar life, and the transition from an idealistic to a realistic presentation of life.²

Beach, in speaking of Lawrence as characteristic of our time, contrasts him with the old age in this way:

...he has made here a sincere and not unskilled effort to present a phase of truth in which the Victorians did not interest themselves -- to render the very feel and texture of an erotic experience; not to tell about it in intellectual generalizations but to give the items of which it is composed. And this is the constant occupation of our cleverest writers of fiction; to render the very feel and texture of experience, not merely erotic, but of all experience that comes within the compass of the author's subject.³

And George Snell says: "The dominant line taken by American fiction in the twentieth century has certainly been that of realism."⁴

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1. Van Doren, op. cit., p. 118.
2. Arthur Hobson Quinn: American Fiction An Historical and Critical Survey, p. 719.
3. Beach, op. cit., p. 23.
4. George Snell: The Shapers of American Fiction 1798-1947, p. 198.

American fiction in the twentieth century includes, of course, bestsellers. Thomas Uzzell shows us that the same flavor of realism is characteristic of popular works of today. Under "A Classification of Novels for Writers" in his handbook, he gives this description:

II Popular Literary Novels

These books overlap classes I (Popular Pot-boilers) and III (Literary Art) inasmuch as they are based on the life of today, are often written well, and attain realistic fidelity to the externals of life. Here are found most of the best sellers. Lending library fiction.¹

F. Three Distinctive Qualities of Modern Writing

The preceding authors describe the qualities of modern writing in their own phrases which, of course, differ slightly. Many other terms for setting them forth could be found. That the authors are delineating essentially the same qualities is more evident to one familiar with the techniques employed to produce them.

However, the reader can draw some parallels at this point. For, all the authors speak of or imply strongly that modern writing has simplicity, vitality and restraint. The broader terms of economy, energy, and subtlety will be used in this study to assure the inclusion of pertinent techniques. The expressions economy and energy come from a list of eight qualities of good writing given in Writing

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1. Thomas H. Uzzell: Writing As a Career, p. 217.

Mature Prose.¹ The term subtle appears in material by Alden already quoted.

1. Economy

The principle of economy, stated briefly, is that no words should be used if the idea is just as clear and meaningful without them.²

Here is the giving up of old affectations and mannerisms, the dispensing with masquerade, the spontaneous and less ornate speech of which Alden spoke. Here is the stark severity of Crane as outlined by Adams. Here are the coldly truthful descriptions of Van Doran.

2. Energy

Energy is strength, and communication often fails simply because the reader does not feel the impact of the writer's mental energy. Energy of writing supplies the momentum for the transmission of many difficult ideas across the barrier of a reader's inattention.³

Here are the direct and vital impressions to which Alden says we are receptive. Here is what Adams means when he says he finds our books vital and stimulating.⁴ Here are Van Doren's crisp and pointed dialogues and penetrating character analyses.

3. Subtlety

There is one very important fact which is likely to become apparent before we have gone very far: the fact that we can no more depend on placards

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1. Baxter Hathaway: Writing Mature Prose, p. 12
2. Ibid., p.9
3. Ibid., p. 11
4. Ante., p. 12, footnote

and labels, on abstract statements.. It isn't going to mean much to the reader to say, "I felt sad," or "This made me angry." The chief way to make the mood or emotion real to the reader is to build it up by concrete details of sensation and action.¹

Here is what Alden means when he speaks of multiplying the veils of art and the illusion of romance. Here is what he means when he says:

So in literature the obvious and striking instances of creative power pass, giving place to a higher and more complex organization in which that power is veiled more and more in the progressive course of culture.²

Here is why Crane did not sentimentalize or moralize, but told his tale in simple, stark severity. This is why Adams characterizes modern writing as exact observation of a logical connection of facts.

G. Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to discover what qualities of writing enjoy popular appeal in twentieth century America. Popularity was narrowed in its definition to books in the bestseller category. Since such books were found to be those with recent dates of publication, the study turned to discovering what qualities prevailed in the fiction from 1900 until the present day. The statements of Henry Mills Alden and J. Donald Adams, men of literary prestige, and others

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1. John T. Frederick: Good Writing, p. 224.
2. Alden, op. cit., p. 137.

helped in establishing that fiction since the turn of the century has exhibited a certain realistic vitality which it lacked during the earlier Victorian Age. A further synthesis of this realistic vitality led to the conclusion that the qualities characteristic of modern writing, including best-sellers, are economy, energy and subtlety. Economy involves the using of as few words as possible in transmitting meaning to the reader. Energy involves the using of such words as to grip and sustain the reader's interest. Subtlety involves the using of those words which connote, rather than denote, the writer's attitudes about the situations and people depicted in the writing.

CHAPTER TWO

TECHNIQUES OF WRITING WHICH PRODUCE
ECONOMY, ENERGY AND SUBTLETY

CHAPTER TWO

TECHNIQUES OF WRITING WHICH PRODUCE ECONOMY, ENERGY AND SUBTLETY

A. Introduction

Any given technique of writing may contribute to the production of more than one quality. Hence, the changing of sentence structure may produce variety, but may also produce a rhythm which makes the writing more readable. The rhythm and variety would add, then, to the writing's interest, and a whole hierarchy of qualities could be worked out from the simple technique of varying the structure.

In this chapter, certain techniques will be classified arbitrarily as producing certain qualities. However, in actuality, the techniques overlap and dovetail in the producing of qualities. Those which contribute to economy may contribute also to energy and subtlety. Since writing which enjoys popular appeal displays all three qualities, one technique should not be accepted and practiced while others are rejected and never used. All of the techniques should be considered a unit, and each one should be put into use as often as occasion requires.

B. Techniques which Produce Economy

The quality of economy caters to today's hurried reader. If you must tell him something, you do well to tell it to him in precise, quick terms before his busy schedule sends him elsewhere.¹ Two techniques which produce economy are concreteness and selectivity.

1. Concreteness

"Above all, stay as close as you can to concrete language"² advises Baxter Hathaway. This means that the writer ought to use such completely accurate terms in describing experiences and people that his readers will see them truthfully in detail. The descriptions will portray their objects with such uniqueness that the reader will not confuse them with other objects. "Language is concrete," Hathaway continues, "when it refers to individual actions and individual persons

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1. Harry Franklin Harrington: Pathways to Print, p. 90.
2. Hathaway, op. cit., p. 12.
 - cf. Frederick, op. cit., p. 48.
 - Irwin Griggs: Writer's Adviser for Freshman Composition, p. 49.
 - Pearl Hogue: The Process of Creative Writing, p. 1.
 - Edward Jones Kilduff: Words and Human Nature, p. 78.
 - H. K. Nixon: Psychology for the Writer, p. 194.
 - Norman G. Shidle: Clear Writing for Easy Reading, p. 118.
 - George G. Williams: Creative Writing for Advanced College Classes, p. 139.

and individual settings."¹

Irwin Griggs compares the writer in his constant search for concrete words to the lens of a camera in its constant adjustment for obtaining a sharp focus. "Your job as a writer is to move up on your subject."² he explains. Thus, the modern author would never write of a "piano" if he could, with honesty, write of a "baby grand" or an "upright". He would not be content to tell you she carried a basket of apples, if he could tell you she carried a basket of Baldwin apples. He would move up on his subject as close as he dared and give as vivid a word picture of it as he possibly could.

By keeping the perceptions vivid and accurate, the writer enables his reader to catch the thought of what he is writing quickly and keep moving along with his reading. Generalities and abstractions slow down the reading rate.

Your mind (as a reader) must either work to translate the generalities into specific concepts of your own - or it will receive words without any sharp thought register.³

Nixon expresses the value of the concrete in a negative way. Under a section titled "Anesthetic Writing" (by which he means writing which will put the reader to sleep) he says:

Second, be abstract. This is especially important if the subject is a scientific one, for the readers

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1. Hathaway, loc. cit.
2. Griggs, op. cit., p. 10.
3. Shidle, op. cit., p. 118.

of such material are apt to be more determined and alert, and if one is to overcome their resistance it is necessary to avoid anything that might arouse vivid or emotionalized images.¹

Along with concreteness, the writer must link simplicity and avoid being unduly technical. He need not be so avid in his economy that his concrete words are accurate but unknown to his readers. When the most concrete term for any given subject threatens to lose the reader, the writer will do well to either drop into a simple explanation of the term or, if this is not possible, cast the situation in an apt metaphor.

The Christian writer, especially, may have difficulty in conveying the content of his message in concrete language. He is called upon to write and speak of great abstractions, like truth and grace and sanctification. Nathan Starr says, "Obscurity is a high hurdle to leap in any kind of reading", and one sort of obscurity "arises when the author wrestles with an idea so important to him and to mankind generally that the answer almost if not quite eludes him."² Obscurity of this sort is a besetting problem to the Christian writer. But concrete language, often in the metaphor device, can be found to convey the message. The Scriptures themselves communicate many truths in this way. As Griggs remarks:

The Bible is another inexhaustible mine of concrete language. In it the most abstract moral

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1. Nixon, op. cit., p. 194.

2. Nathan Starr: The Dynamics of Literature, p. 102.

ideas are put into concrete terms, like tares and wheat and the eye of a needle.¹

2. Selectivity

When a writer is highly selective in his choice and arrangement of material, he caters to his readers in two ways. He spares their reading pointless material, and he keeps their thoughts moving toward whatever goal or conclusion he wishes them to attain. Starr says:

By selection and arrangement of material in accordance with a single purpose he (the writer) concentrates the attention upon the essential shape of things both in the seen and the unseen world.²

The writer, then, ought to have a single purpose in mind before he begins to write. He selects such material as will contribute to that purpose and rejects any material, no matter how choice, which will detract from it.

In trying to decide what details and incidents to include, the writer will try to achieve a balance between reality and interest.³ The inclusion of realistic details lends authenticity to whatever account the writer is telling and bolsters the reader's belief that he is reading truth. The more concrete the details, the more realistic they will

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1. Griggs, op. cit., p. 49.

2. Starr, op. cit., p. 22.

cf. Frederick, op. cit., p. 88.

Harrington, op. cit., p. 91.

Hogrefe, op. cit., pp. 17 and 40.

Williams, op. cit., pp. 12 and 43.

3. Albert L. Walker: Minimum Essentials for Good Writing, p. 59.

seem. Walker informs that:

Any writing which is to get the real interest of the people who read must touch in some way the subjective side of experience. By the subjective element in writing we mean primarily (1) any report or description of real experience, real interests, thoughts, attitudes, hopes and fears; or (2) facts which touch these things in people's minds.¹

Realism is important, but it needs to be tempered with interest material, lest it degenerate into a sociological report and nothing more. For, selectivity, which culls out the interesting and important, lifts the written work from a reportorial classification to an artistic classification.²

Adams reminds the writer:

If you are writing about a bore - a teller, let us say of interminable and pointless stories - you defeat your purpose if you bring to your portrait of him a complete and literal transcription of his talk: you yourself become a bore.³

In criticizing the prose of Theodore Dreiser, he expresses the irritation of the modern reader when he reads unsifted material:

Unfortunately, he had no more selectivity than a glacier, and pebbles and boulders alike were carried forward in that unrelenting march.⁴

In being selective, the writer avoids repetition. What he says once he does not say again, unless he wishes to stress

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1. Albert L. Walker: Minimum Essentials for Good Writing, p. 42.
2. Norman Foerster: Literary Scholarship, p. 190.
3. Adams, op. cit., p. 65.
4. Ibid., p. 55.

some point in order better to lead his reader to the goal. He might repeat the material, also, if he were attempting to teach it. But, unlike the novelists of yesteryear who feared that their readers might misconstrue their meaning and therefore repeated matters which were really quite obvious, the modern writer makes his point quickly and passes on to the next one. He does not belittle the intelligence of his reader by telling him what he does not need to tell him.

Adams says:

In all descriptive writing, whether of travel or people or food or sex, there is so much which the reader can supply himself, or which does not concern him, that a certain amount of selection and suggestion strengthens the picture and brings it into sharper focus; otherwise it is weakened and blurred by the introduction of an excessive amount of detail.¹

C. Techniques Which Produce Energy

Writing which displays the quality of economy uses as few words as possible in the conveying of its message. Writing which displays the quality of energy uses the most forceful words it can find to convey its message. Like economical writing, it caters to today's hurried reader who will not spend a great deal of time studying and analysing dull reading material in order to discover its point of interest. The material must exhibit a certain vitality from the very beginning, if it is even to attract his attention.² Two tech-

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1. Ibid., p. 65.

2. Harrington, op. cit., p. 90.

niques for producing energy in writing are keeping the style simple and writing of personal experience.

1. Simplicity

Many young, would-be writers begin their compositions in very stilted, ornate styles.¹ In their high school classes they were introduced to Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton as great writers of the past, and they assume that great writing of the present apes the styles of these distinguished authors. While they never speak in flowery terms themselves, these novice writers think that somehow in writing their thoughts on paper they must find and use pompous phraseology. They fail to realize that writing style has changed.

Our most esteemed writers have more real simplicity than Addison, whose elegances, natural for his time, would repel us as artificial,²

says Alden.

Modern writing is not unlike modern conversation and flows along with easy naturalness. Therefore the writer who wishes to appeal to the modern American reader will keep his words simple and his sentences short. Shidle says:

The simple word has the additional advantage of being comfortable to write and comfortable to read. Pretentious words bring a certain self-consciousness, which makes for cold reception.

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1. Frederick, op. cit., p. 46.
2. Ante, Chapter 1, p. 10.

Their impersonal distant tone doesn't stir the reader's mind readily.¹

Simple words are often more vivid and concrete than long, complicated ones. Verbs, which carry the action of any clause, are very important. Good writers avoid using forms of the verb "to be" and search for strong, active verbs which will make an impact upon their readers.² Such verbs they cast in the present rather than the past tense, if this is possible in the material they are writing.

Regarding sentence structure, Shidle warns:

Long, complex sentences should enter everyday writing only when put there by design; only when the writer consciously decides for slow-pacing. Most long-sentence writing is not so born. Usually it results from the writer's inability to do any better.³

Good writers keep their thoughts per sentence low and use active, rather than passive, voice most of the time.⁴ This style gives their material a crispness and energy that appeals to the modern reader. Shidle concludes:

Short sentences (and short words) decrease the mental horse-power needed to raise your ideas from the page into your reader's mind.⁵

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1. Shidel, op. cit., p. 85.
cf. Nixon, op. cit., p. 195.
Williams, op. cit., p. 82.
Kilduff, op. cit., p. 119.
2. Shidle, op. cit., p. 63.
cf. Harrington, op. cit., p. 18.
Hogrefe, op. cit., p. 21.
3. Shidle, op. cit., p. 58.
cf. Frederick, op. cit., p. 79.
4. Shidle, op. cit., p. 63.
cf. Hogrefe, op. cit., p. 21.
5. ibid., p. 75.

2. Writing of Personal Experience

Many young, would-be writers compose themes about experiences which are totally foreign to them. In their zeal to be interesting, they attempt to take the reader to a country they have never seen, introduce him to people they have never known, and convince him of incidents they have never lived through. Very few of them can supply sufficiently realistic detail about these imaginary episodes to persuade the reader that the facts are true.

Much student writing is false and absurd because its materials have been searched for in some unreal sentimental arcadia,¹

says Frederick. It becomes so weak and hazy that the reader abandons it soon.

These writers do not realize that their own lives are interesting, if properly observed and evaluated. "No material matches that provided by a writer's own experience,"² says Adams. And Griggs tells why this is so: "You can write with an interest and force that nothing else can supply if you write about things that have happened to you."³

The authors of the modern bestsellers which will be

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1. Frederick, op. cit., p. 13
2. Adams, op. cit., p. 85
cf. Frederick, op. cit., pp. 12 and 13
Hogrefe, op. cit., p. 3
Williams, op. cit., pp. 309 and 310
George Steward Wykoff: The Harper Handbook of
College Composition, p. 209.
3. Griggs, op. cit. p. 55

cited for illustrative purposes later on in this chapter write of environments they know. In Arrowsmith, Sinclair Lewis wrote of the middle west where he was born and reared. Since the hero of the novel was a bacteriologist, Lewis secured the help of Paul de Kruif, author of Our Medicine Men and other works about the medical field. Of the collaboration de Kruif wrote:

It was to be Lewis who wrote the story, but the present writer was to go with him wherever it was necessary to collect material, to teach him about microbes, to recount to him the lore of laboratorie....¹

Mrs. Miniver, another book this study will consider, has an English housewife, the mother of three children, for its heroine. The author, Mrs. Maxtone-Graham (pseudonym: Jan Struther) was a housewife in England from 1923 until 1940 and was the mother of three children.²

The third book, Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea recounts a fishing experience in Cuban waters. "Time" magazine says of the author: "For fifteen years Hemingway has lived in Cuba."³ In describing "a seagoing day" in his life (apparently a rather typical day), it says: "In fluid Spanish, Hemingway and the mate decide to fish the waters off Cojimar, the little fishing village near which Heming-

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1. Paul de Kruif: "I Helped Lewis Write Arrowsmith," Designer Magazine, June, 1924, p. 2.
2. Information regarding author in Pocketbook edition of Mrs. Miniver.
3. Profile on Hemingway, Time Magazine, December 13, 1954, p. 71.

way set The Old Man and the Sea".¹

Lewis and Struther and Hemingway are building their stories out of personal experience in familiar environments.

Historical novelists engage in careful research on the period of which they expect to write in preparation for their works. Gladys Schmidt spent twelve months doing Biblical research before beginning a line of her bestseller, David the King.²

A Christian writer should begin by following the advice of the apostle Peter who urged the early followers to concentrate, in their witnessing, upon the hope that is "in you."³

If, as his skill in communicating increases, he wishes to broaden his subject matter, he should keep Grigg's advice in mind:

If you must depart from your own immediate experience, go as little distant from it as possible; in other words, go to the lives of friends or relatives or associates who are close enough to you so that you know the details by having been able in part to share what has happened to them. If you have shared the experience, it is, in the larger sense of the word, a part of your own experience.⁴

The writer should not try to write about Biblical happenings until he has some aptitude in writing about his own surroundings, and until he has done adequate research on the period.

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1. Time, loc. cit.

2. Information supplied thesis writer in interview with her husband, Simon Goldfield.

3. I Peter 3:15.

4. Griggs, op. cit. p. 55.

D. Techniques Which Produce Subtlety

The modern reader does not want his independence checked in his reading. He wants to live through the experiences recorded, but he does not want to be told what conclusions he is to draw from those experiences. He wants to be free to make up his own mind about the rightness and wrongness of the characters and incidents of which he reads.

Earlier writers, particularly the Victorian novelists, injected a great deal of editorial comment into their tales. Adams says of them:

If there was ever any danger of your missing the point or of being confused over the rights and wrongs involved in a specific situation, he was always ready with a little homily to settle your mind for you and set your feet on the right path.¹

And this characteristic, says Beach, is the crux of modern reader's vexation with their works:

That is the point of objection. We cannot be the worse for the wisdom of these big men, these large souls. But, for better for worse, the fashion has changed; we like fiction unadulterated; we like the sense of taking part in an actual, a present experience, without the interference of an authorial guide.²

Subtlety, then, is a key quality in modern writing. The techniques which help produce it are the restraining of sentimentality and characterizing of the people in the story through their words and actions.

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1. Adams, op. cit., p. 194.
2. Ante, Chapter 1, p. 12.

1. Restrain Sentimentality

"Don't overwrite," cautions Walker. "It's better to make your point by understatement than by screaming about your sorrows. Don't try to be poetic." ¹

Old writers were very forthright in their portrayals of people caught in emotional experiences. Their heroines fainted, their old ladies wept copiously and their men blurted out long oratorical comments. It was not uncommon for a character to tell the reader how virtuous and long-suffering he was and to proceed to mouth lines of self-pity quite foreign in modern novels.

For, modern writers temper the emotional content of their material. They write vividly and freely about externals - "to render the very feel and texture of experience"² - but practice sentimental restraint in all the crisis points of their narratives.

Bestseller authoress Catherine Marshall gives this insight into her own writing adventures:

Life as you and I know it is of the heart as well as the head. Literature, if it is accurately to reflect life, must at times reach past the reader's intellect to the emotional level. In order to achieve that the writer has to feel something as he writes. There were times during the writing of

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1. Walker, op. cit., p. 48.
cf. Frederick, op. cit., p. 46.
Harrington, op. cit., p. 296.
Williams, op. cit., p. 70.
2. Ante, Chapter 1, p. 13.

A Man Called Peter when reliving the drama of my life with Peter was almost too much for me. That was particularly true during the week I wrote the chapter on Peter's death. Not only did I have to re-experience every vivid detail in order to transfer it to paper, but there was the necessity of holding that emotion in check. I am convinced that real communication in writing always has to be disciplined. It is never achieved by sticky sentimentality or by careless diffusiveness. Trying to attain anything approaching this ideal was like attempting to rein in a pair of runaway horses - exhausting at best!¹

Christian writers who wish to appeal to today's readers will convey emotion through understatement rather than through outbursts of sentimental display unnatural in our age.

2. Characterize by use of dialogue and action

A skilled modern writer describes the physical appearance, the speech habits, the gestures and actions - even the mental endeavors, of his characters, but he does not interpret them. Frederick explains:

In presenting people in our stories we can't use placards. We can't label a character "honest" or kind-hearted" or "prone to exaggerate" and expect a reader to be interested in a character so labeled. We must let the reader get acquainted with the character in our story. We must let the reader see the character, hear him talk, watch his actions. Then the character will become real and alive to the reader's mind, and our story will become vital and interesting too.²

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1. Catherine Marshall: "My Life Since A Man Called Peter", McCalls magazine, August, 1953, p. 108.
2. Frederick, op. cit., p. 206.
Griggs, op. cit., p. 168.
Harrington, op. cit., p. 401.
Hogrefe, op. cit., pp. 124-143.
Williams, op. cit., p. 371.
Wykoff, op. cit., p. 257.

The Christian writer or teacher or preacher will let his audience get acquainted with the characters he wants them to know. He will recount what they said and did and, in this way, arouse interest in both the characters and the moral of his story.

E. Illustrations from Literature in regard to the Techniques

1. Illustrations from popular literature prior to 1900

Popular books in the literary ages prior to 1900 lacked, to a large degree, the qualities of economy, energy, and subtlety. And the works provoke in the modern reader, if not the resentment of which Alden wrote, at least a tolerant smile.

Since bestseller lists were not kept by publishers before 1895, popularity is not determined as easily as it is today. This study will rely upon the findings of Alice Hackett, Van Wyck Brooks and Grant Knight, each of whom has done creditable research on the subject.

The first book to be considered is *Pamela*. Of this work, Hackett states:

Samuel Richardson's Pamela, first novel to be printed in America, published in 1744, introduced the writer whose novels were probably the most popular of any in the eighteenth century.¹

Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded, consists of four volumes of letters a pure-hearted servant girl sends to her parents over a space of several years. Obviously, male novelist Richardson

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1. Hackett, op. cit., p. 131.

was not writing of personal experience. No clear physical description of the heroine is given, and her letters contain a very minimum of description of her surroundings and acquaintances. The reader has difficulty reconstructing the feel and texture of the girl's experiences. Here is a typical excerpt from one of the letters:

When we were alone, I told her all that had passed; for, ruminating on everything, I thought, though he had bid me not, yet if he should come to know I had told, it would be no worse; for to keep a secret of such a nature, would be, as I apprehended, to deprive myself of the good advice which I never wanted more; and might encourage him to think I did not resent it as I ought, and would keep worse secrets, and so make him do worse by me.¹

The reader notices almost at once the lack of simplicity in this passage. The ninety-one words form but one sentence, which naturally, in its length, becomes complex and involved. The words are not simple, but come from a stilted vocabulary: ruminating, bid, apprehended, deprive. The verbs are weak in that they bring no sharp pictures before our mind's eye: told, thought, know, keep, wanted, encourage, resent. The phrasing is vague: "a secret of such a nature" and "good advice which I never wanted more". And, that Pamela is a sweet maid who will not keep "worse secrets" or encourage "him" to "do worse" by her is belabored so much in the passage that it loses all subtlety to the mind of today's reader. At another point in

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1. Samuel Richardson: Pamela, vol. I, pp. 20 and 21.

volume one, Pamela tells us: "so here have I lived above sixteen years in virtue and reputation..."¹ A modern writer would not permit his character to interpret himself seriously to the reader in such obvious terms.

Another popular work before the turn of the century was Oliver Goldsmith's The Vicar of Wakefield. In Brooks' investigation of America between 1783 and 1859, he tells of the selling trips of Parson Weems, an agent for the Philadelphia publisher Matthew Carey. Among the books listed as best-sellers by the Parson is The Vicar of Wakefield.²

Goldsmith's narrative is cast in story form and moves along with action and dialogue. But its descriptions are lifeless and its dialogues are overdrawn and sentimental. Here is the vague description of the vicar's wife:

To do her justice, she was a good-natured notable woman; and as for breeding, there were few country ladies who could show more. She could read any English book without much spelling; but for pickling, preserving, and cookery none could excel her. She prided herself also upon being an excellent contriver in housekeeping, though I could never find that we grew richer with all her contrivances.³

Was she stout or thin, blonde or brunette? Did she have an old recipe handed down from her aunt which made her preserves so excellent? And with what housekeeping contrivances did she clutter the manse? The writer never really individualizes

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1. Ibid., p. 257.

2. Van Wyck Brooks: The World of Washington Irving, p. 3.

3. Oliver Goldsmith: The Vicar of Wakefield, p. 1.

this wife from the many others for his readers.

Here is a typical sample of the speech in Goldsmith's dialogues:

"She's an ungrateful creature," cried my wife, who could scarcely speak for weeping, "to use us thus; she never had the least constraint put upon her affections. The vile strumpet has basely deserted her parents without any provocation; thus to bring your grey hairs to the grave, and I must shortly follow."¹

Such oratory coming from a weeping, heart-broken woman seems highly unnatural to the twentieth century mind. And modern readers would stumble over the several inflated phrases: ungrateful creature, least constraint, vile strumpet, basely deserted and without any provocation.

The third and final book of the pre-1900 period for consideration falls into the transition category. By 1870, European and English writing showed signs of emerging from this restricted style. Thomas Hardy's Far From the Madding Crowd, published in England in 1874, had more strength and credibleness to it than earlier novels, but it still lacked the economy, energy and subtlety of modern works. By 1890 the Hardy stories were circulating in the United States. Knight says:

Hardy was read over here with a kind of shudder but he was read widely; Far From the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native, selling well in the United States, had brought respect for his stern nobility and courage.²

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1. Ibid., p. 83.

2. Grant C. Knight: *The Critical Period in American Literature*, p. 14.

Hardy spends time describing the physical surroundings in which his characters act, so that his readers may enter into their experiences more readily. But his descriptions lack economy and energy. Here is his picture of a summer day:

The oat-harvest began, and all the men were afield under a monochromatic Lammas sky, amid the trembling air and short shadows of noon. Indoors nothing was to be heard save the droning of blue-bottle flies; out-of-doors the whetting of scythes and the hiss of tressy oat-ears rubbing together as their perpendicular stalks of amber-yellow fell heavily to each swath. Every drop of moisture not in the men's bottles and flagons in the form of cider was raining as perspiration from their foreheads and cheeks. Drought was everywhere else.¹

In several places this passage is quite concrete, especially in phrasing like: "amid the trembling air" and "droning of blue-bottle flies" and "the hiss of tressy oat-ears rubbing together". The paragraph is weakened by its frequent use of forms of the verb "to be". The author failed to find strong verbs and let them energize his writing. His style could have more simplicity too. Few readers would comprehend the meaning of "a monochromatic Lammas sky" and the shortest sentence, except the last one, is twenty-three words in length.

Far From the Madding Crowd lacked subtlety also. For, although Hardy did not allow the character himself to tell you what traits were his, he made sure that you grasp what those traits were. The heroine of the story is a girl named

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1. Thomas Hardy: Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 254.

Bathsheba. In the first chapter, she is sitting waiting for her waggoner to retrieve the tailboard of her wagon. She pulls out a little mirror, looks at herself and smiles. Concerning this action, Hardy expounds:

What possessed her to indulge in such a performance in the sight of sparrow, blackbirds, and unperceived farmer who were alone its spectators, - whether the smile began as a factitious one, to test her capacity in the art, - nobody knows: it ended certainly in a real smile.

She did not adjust her hat, or pat her hair, or press a dimple into shape, or do one thing to signify that any such intention had been her motive in taking up the glass. She simply observed herself as a fine product of nature in the feminine kind, her thoughts seeming to guide into far-off though likely dramas in which men would play a part - vistas of probable triumphs - the smiles being of a phase suggesting that hearts were imagined as lost and won.¹

After such long editorial comment, the reader would think that Hardy had established the motivating factor in Bathsheba's life most adequately. But Hardy is not sure. At the conclusion of this chapter, therefore, he engages the unperceived farmer in a discussion of the girl with a gatekeeper on the road. The farmer concludes that the girl's greatest fault is vanity.² The reader is not permitted to interpret the mirror incident for himself and decide on his own what Bathsheba is like.

Such was the lack of subtlety in the old popular novels. Coupled as it was with lack of economy and energy, the novels no longer appeal to modern American readers.

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1. Ibid, p. 5.

2. Ibid, p. 10.

2. Illustrations from popular literature after 1900

Books like When Knighthood Was In Flower, whose elegant title betrays its elegant contents, dropped off the bestseller lists after 1900, and were replaced by the sterner works of Edith Wharton and Eric ReMarque. By 1925, Sinclair Lewis' Arrowsmith was seventh in the list of the ten best-sellers.¹

Lewis writes descriptions of scenes and people in terms which grasp the interest of the modern reader. In contrast to Hardy's long, weak depiction of a summer day, Lewis describes one in this vivid manner:

Midmost of the black-soiled Iowa plain, watered only by a shallow and insignificant creek, the city of Nautilus bakes and rattles and glistens. For hundreds of miles the tall corn springs in a jungle of undeviating rows, and the stranger who sweatily trudges the corn-walled roads is lost and nervous with the sense of merciless growth.²

Hardy described his scene in eighty-eight words; Lewis took only fifty-six. Yet, by being highly selective, making each word count, and by being very concrete, Lewis tells us just as much, if not more, than Hardy did. Strong verbs like bakes, rattles, glistens, and trudges energize Lewis' passage. The reader's thought is not detoured by the use of any unusual or unnatural phrases.

The same vibrancy appears in the descriptions of people

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1. Hackett, op. cit., pp. 16 and 51.

2. Sinclair Lewis: Arrowsmith, p. 193.

in Arrowsmith. In contrast to Goldsmith's vague portrayal of the vicar's wife, here is how Lewis introduces a woman:

Madeline was a handsome, high-colored, high-spirited, opinionated girl whom Martin had known in college...She considered herself a superb tennis player; she played it with energy and valuable swoopings and large lack of direction. She believed herself a connoisseur of literature; the fortunates to whom she gave approval were Hardy, Meredith, Howells, and Thackeray, none of whom she had read in five years. She had often reproved Martin for his inappreciation of Howells, for wearing flannel shirts, and for his failure to hand her down from street cars in the manner of a fiction hero.¹

Another of the bestsellers in the twentieth century is Mrs. Miniver by Jan Struther. In 1940, this account of English family life was third on the bestseller list. But in the five years that followed, it sold 1,304,000 copies, rendering it eligible for Hackett's "all time" bestseller listing of books which sold over 500,000.²

Struther is a master at restraining sentimentality; she is an extremely subtle conveyor of drama. One of the most emotional events in the life of the Miniver family comes when war separates them. It is significant that Struther tells of this event in retrospect. The essay begins with the heroine talking to the housekeeper:

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1. Ibid, p. 24.

2. Hackett, op. cit., pp. 81 and 122.

"And a Welsh rabbit," said Mrs. Miniver. "Vin'll be spending the night here, and he likes that. Why, Mrs. Adie, what's the matter?"

"It's nothing, madam," said Mrs. Adie, fumbling in vain for a handkerchief and finally wiping her eyes on her apron. "It's only, it's so nice to be back to normal again." A wintry smile re-established itself on her thin lips; she went out of the room, sniffing. It was the first sign of emotion she had shown since the Crisis began.¹

The heroine meditates on the housekeeper's statement and during the course of her thoughts reveals that her husband had been manning his anti-aircraft post, her children evacuated to the country, and she herself had signed as an ambulance driver. The show of emotion, however, comes from the subordinate character, the maid. It is not actually stated that the maid cried and her display is quickly checked, as though the writer shies from dwelling on it further. Such restrained writing is very effective in touching the modern reader. Throughout the entire book the author never spoils her work by telling you or allowing anyone else to tell you that Mrs. Miniver is noble and valiant. By seeing her act and hearing her speak the reader draws this conclusion for himself.

A third bestseller in the twentieth century is Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea. It remained on "The New York Times" bestseller list for 26 weeks, from September, 1952 to March, 1953. It is the story of an unusual fishing

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1. Jan Struther: Mrs. Miniver, p. 61.

adventure of a scarred and penniless old fisherman in Cuba. Of his scars, Hemingway writes with vividness: "They were as old as eroisons in a fishless desert."¹

The Pulitzer prize-winning author is intent on characterizing the old man in order to win sympathy for him. Therefore, Hemingway makes free use of the dialogue and monologue techniques. Since his hero is alone in a boat for the greater part of the story, the reader is permitted to eavesdrop on his conversation with himself and with his fish. Here is an example:

"They must have taken a quarter of him and of the best," he said aloud. "I wish it were a dream and that I had never hooked him. I'm sorry about it fish. It makes everything wrong." He stopped and he did not want to look at the fish now. Drained of blood and awash he looked the colour of the silver backing of a mirror and his stripes still showed.

"I shouldn't have gone out so far, fish," he said. "Neither for you nor for me. I'm sorry fish."²

The rest of the book exhibits the same energy, economy and subtlety which were noted in Arrowsmith and Mrs. Miniver, and which were lacking in Pamela, The Vicar of Wakefield and Far From the Madding Crowd. If a narrative is to gain popularity in modern America, it must be vivid, fast-paced and underdrawn.

F. Summary

This chapter undertook a study of writing techniques

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1. Ernest Hemingway: The Old Man and the Sea, p. 8.
2. Ibid., p. 121.

which would give the material written the qualities of economy, energy and subtlety. It established that the writer achieves economy by using concrete language and by being selective in his composition. Vivid terms catapult the thought under discussion into the reader's mind, thus saving the writer the necessity of lengthy explanations. Selectivity carries the reader swiftly to the writer's goal. The reader is neither detoured by irrelevant material or confused by an excess of meaningless material.

The study established that the writer achieves energy by keeping his style simple and by writing on subjects with which he is acquainted personally. Short sentences and conversational words carry the reader's thought along easily and rapidly. And when the narrative displays an accuracy of detail which one who has known a similar experience can give it, the reader is convinced by it and interested in it, It has a force or energy which appeals.

And finally, the study established that the writer achieves subtlety by understating the drama of his narrative and by characterizing its actors through their words and actions. Flowery speeches and exaggerated emotional displays no longer appeal to American readers. But they respond sensitively to calm heroes and heroines, when the author tells us what they said and what they did and spares the reader what he thinks of them.

After considering the techniques which give modern

writing its appealing qualities, the study turned to illustrations of the techniques. In order to bring the qualities into sharp relief, selections from popular literature prior to 1900 were sited first. They lacked the economy, energy and subtlety which attract the modern reader. Pamela, a 1744 novel, used stilted language and complex sentence structure. Its vagueness made it hard for the reader to empathize with the heroine. Passages from Goldsmith's classic, The Vicar of Wakefield, seemed bombastic and unreal. And even Hardy's turn-of-the-century work, Far From the Madding Crowd, lacked selectivity and freedom from characterizing the story participants over obviously.

In contrast to these, the three bestsellers of the twentieth century which were considered exhibited excellent economy, energy, and subtlety. Sinclair Lewis' descriptions in Arrowsmith rang with concreteness and selectivity. Mrs. Miniver by Han Struther drew its heroine with artistic subtlety. And Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea builds a thin plot into both a Pulitzer Prize winner and a bestseller through its skillful use of dialogue and monologue.

The techniques dovetail and merge into one another in producing the modern, appealing qualities. Therefore, the Christian writer was urged to consider them as a unit and use each of them as occasion requires.

CHAPTER THREE
THE TECHNIQUES AND QUALITIES
IN CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

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A. Introduction

Secular literature which is very popular in twentieth century America displays the qualities of economy, energy and subtlety. At a vivid, fast pace, it tells the reader the essence of the matter under discussion and allows him to complete and evaluate it in his own meditations. Writing which treats Christian themes can command similar popularity if it exhibits the same appealing qualities. ✓

The question may arise as to whether or not it is possible to reduce great, abstract religious concepts to concrete, picturesque terms. It arises because of a dualism in the thinking process of Americans. In the everyday matters of life, Americans retain the habit of their ancestors of speaking in rich, vivid language. Frederick says:

...we have inherited from our grandfathers a distinct preference for bold, racy concreteness in our daily speech... We do not speak of taking the motor apart or of regulating it or putting it in good condition; we "tear it down" and we "tune it up;" and ordinarily we do not say that we increase the speed of the car - we "step on it."¹

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1. Frederick, op. cit., p. 55.

But when Americans begin to think and talk and write about philosophical matters, they are prone to express themselves in abstractions more native to Greek thinking than native to truly American thinking. The Hebrews knew no such dualism. They expressed their religious thought as vividly as their mundane thought. That is why the Bible is "another inexhaustible mine of concrete language"¹ as Griggs stated.

John Paterson brings out the Greek attitude in western thinking in his warning:

We will bear in mind that when we deal with the Bible we are dealing with an ancient literature whose methods of thought and expression differ greatly from our own... We are so accustomed to our own thought processes, derived mainly from Greek sources, that we forget that here we are concerned with a literature that knew little or nothing of such processes and all too frequently we make this book say what we think it should say and we fail to hear what it really does say.²

He goes on to contrast western proverbs with Jewish proverbs.

We say union is strength where both terms are abstract; the Semite says two dogs kill a lion: that is realistic and related to life. It is something he has seen and observed. Familiarity breeds contempt is thoroughly English and completely abstract but how eloquent is the Jewish rendering of the same thought: The poor man hungers and knows it not.³

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1. Ante, pp. 22, 23.

2. John Paterson: The Book That Is Alive, p. 2.

3. Ibid., pp. 13, 14.

A number of well-written, popular books having Christian themes, plus the Bible itself, are demonstrating to Christian leaders, teachers and pastors that abstract religious concepts can be communicated economically, energetically and subtly. This chapter will examine one of the books of the Bible, the Gospel of Mark, and a modern Christian bestseller, A Man Called Peter to determine to what extent these works exhibit the qualities of writing which appeal today.

B. An Examination of the Book of Mark

This study will concern itself with the so-called Greek Mark and with English translations of Mark which reflect the Greek Mark. Some scholars theorize that the Gospel was written first in Aramaic. But, in that this theory remains quite speculative, the Greek version will form the basis of study here. Illustrations will be given in English from versions prepared by church councils. The statements of said councils reveal that it was their desire to render a faithful translation of the Greek, not to rewrite the Scriptures according to their own fancies.¹ The conclusion is that, essentially, whatever writing techniques Mark used in composing his Greek Gospel will be evident in faithful translations and, therefore, the English

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1. See Epistle Dedicatory in King James Version and prefaces to American Revised Version and Revised Standard Version.

illustrations will reflect the Greek version of Mark.

1. Economy in Mark

When a writer uses concrete language and is highly selective in the material he writes, he produces material which almost certainly has the quality of economy. And material which has economy tells the reader a great deal in a few words.

The very shortness of Mark's account of Jesus' life in contrast to the length of the other three accounts arouses the reader to Mark's economy. He takes sixteen brief chapters to present the life which it takes Matthew twenty-eight chapters, Luke twenty-four chapters, and John twenty-one chapters to present. Archibald Robertson says of Mark:

His Gospel is the briefest of all, and yet it is often fullest when he does give an incident, for the very reason that he supplies so many little items that fill out the picture.¹

Henry Swete, in discussing the Greek Mark, points out both the writer's selectivity and concreteness when he says:

St. Mark knows how to compress his matter, where a multitude of words would only weaken the effect, or where the scheme of his work forbids greater fulness; on the other hand, when words can heighten the colouring or give life to the picture, they are used without regard to brevity and with little attention to elegance.²

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1. Archibald Thomas Robertson: Studies in Mark's Gospel, p. 43.
2. Henry Barclay Swete: The Gospel According to St. Mark, p. xlviii of introduction.

Mark tells of John the Baptist and his heralding ministry in but one hundred ten words, and he paints the suspense and release of Christ's temptation scene in but thirty-three words. Matthew and Luke say that Jesus was "led up" by the Spirit to be tempted, but Mark says the Spirit "drove" Him.¹ John Lange notes:

While Matthew transports us gradually into the events of his time, as he relates what "came to pass in those days," the peculiar expression "immediately," "forthwith," "straightway," employed by Mark, hurries us from one event to another.²

Not only did Mark show economy in his transitions, but in his handling of major themes in the life he was narrating. The reader perceives a great deal about the type of ministry Christ had, the popularity He enjoyed, the miraculous abilities resident in Him, all in this brief, vivid paragraph:

And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to shore. And when they got out of the boat, immediately the people recognized him, and ran about the whole neighborhood and began to bring sick people on their pallets to any place where they heard he was. And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or country, they laid the sick in the market places, and besought him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment; and as many as touched it were made well.³

2. Energy in Mark

When a writer simplifies his style and writes of happenings which are familiar to him, he produces material which almost certainly has energy. And material which has

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1. Matthew 4:1, Luke 4:1 and Mark 1:12.

2. John Peter Lange: The Gospel According to Mark, p. 2.

3. Mark 6:53-56.

energy hurdles the reader's disinterest with a convincing power.

The Gospel of Mark is energetic. The evangelist's style is simple. The words in the typical paragraph quoted previously, though vivid, were comfortable and unostentatious. James Hastings observes:

There is a Quaker-like simplicity of style -- with few digressions, with no wastage of words, so that he is in his simplicity sublime.¹

Of the Greek, Swete says:

The body of the work consists of a series of sentences connected by the simplest of Greek copulas, each contributing a fresh fact to the reader's knowledge, and each by its vivid and distinct presentation of the fact claiming his close attention.²

Mark used strong, accurate verbs,³ and shifted his story into the present tense when such was possible.⁴

Robertson believes that the use of the present tense indicates that Mark was listening to Peter relive his experiences with Christ and was writing the narratives as he heard them.⁵ Most scholars agree that he was writing of

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1. James Hastings: The Speaker's Bible, The Gospel According to Mark, Vol. I, p. 6.
cf. A. M. Hunter: The Gospel According to St. Mark, p. 23.
2. Swete, op. cit., p. xlviii.
3. Melancthon W. Jacobus: A Commentary on the Gospel According to Mark, p. 5.
4. Robertson, op. cit., pp. 24, 25.
cf. Hunter, op. cit., p. 21.
5. Robertson, op. cit., pp. 42, 43.

events which were very close to his own experience.¹

Hunter says:

His pages, too are sprinkled with self-authenticating little vividnesses which suggest the presence of an eyewitness like Peter behind the narrative.²

Thus do Mark's easy style and acquaintance with his subject matter render his narrative energetic.

3. Subtlety in Mark

When a writer restrains the temptation to become sentimental in telling his story and when he characterizes his actors by their words and actions without adding his own comment, he produces material which almost certainly has the quality of subtlety. And subtle material confronts the reader with the skeletal narrative to which the reader fits his own conclusion.

Mark's Gospel has these characteristics. The story of the Crucifixion, especially, is a masterpiece of restraint. Richardson presented the sufferings of a fictitious English servant girl in four volumes; Mark presented the sufferings of the one he called "the Son of God"³ in eleven paragraphs.⁴

The restraint is evidenced more when the reader

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1. Jacobus, op. cit., p. 11.
cf. Robertson, op. cit., pp. 24, 25, 42, 43.
Charles R. Erdman: The Gospel of Mark An Exposition,
p. 9.
Swete, op. cit., p. XXV.
Hastings, op. cit., pp. 4, 5.
2. Hunter, op. cit., p. 21.
3. Mark 1:1.
4. From His arrest in 14:43 to His burial in 15:47 in the Revised Standard Version.

considers the union which existed between Christ and the narraters. Peter as an apostle and Mark as a disciple knew the love of Christ and a deep spiritual fellowship with Him. The temptation to give vent to their sorrow, terror or anger over their Lord's murder must have been great. Mrs. Marshall says that reliving the drama of her life with her beloved husband in order to write it was at times "almost too much for me. That was particularly true during the week I wrote the chapter on Peter's death. Not only did I have to re-experience every vivid detail in order to transfer it to paper, but there was the necessity of holding that emotion in check." Trying to avoid "sticky sentimentality and careless diffusiveness," she explains, "...was like attempting to rein in a pair of runaway horses -- exhausting at best."¹ In reliving the drama of their life with and separation from Christ, Peter and Mark must have gone through this exhausting struggle to an even greater extent.

Mark draws his portrait of Christ by telling what He did and said. Other than announcing at the outset of his Gospel that he is writing of the Son of God, Mark does not inject his own opinions about Christ into the account. When he has shown the reader that Christ rose from the grave, he concludes his writing without any instructions or notes to his readers. John crystalizes his work by

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1. Ante, pp. 32, 33.

saying: "...these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name."¹ Mark assumes that his readers will discern that the uniqueness of the life he narrates compelled him to preserve it on paper for all the generations still to come.

"It is the active ministry of Jesus that Mark is concerned with,..." says Hastings.² Erdman describes it in this way:

The entire contents of this Gospel might be summed up in those words: "To minister, and to give his life." The first nine chapters picture his labors of love in Galilee; over them we might write the legend: "To minister..." This service is one of strenuous activity. Task follows task, with almost breathless rapidity. Every scene is one of life, movement, vigor.³

Then too, he points out that: "The ministry of Christ, as recorded by Mark, is also one of mighty words."⁴

Jacobus states that Mark's aim "was simply to show him (Christ) to others as he had showed himself to his disciples in all the human and superhuman facts of his life." ⁵ In so doing he produced a work invested with economy, energy and subtlety. His Gospel has all the fast-paced vividness which appeals to the buyers of bestsellers in modern America, while it stands, at the same time,

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1. John 20:31.
2. Hastings, op. cit., p. 7.
cf. Jacobus, op. cit., p. 4.
3. Erdman, op. cit., p. 11.
4. Ibid., p. 12.
5. Jacobus, op. cit., pp. 3, 4.

a work of distinctive Christian literature.

C. An Examination of A Man Called Peter

The biography of a consecrated Christian minister, Peter Marshall, went on "The New York Times" bestseller list in the Fall of 1951 and remained on it for approximately one hundred and thirty-five weeks. Written by the minister's wife, the book had the three qualities characteristic of popular modern writing: economy, energy, and subtlety.

In order to make her story economical, Mrs. Marshall used concrete language and selected her material carefully. Chapter eight tells of the Marshall's journey to Scotland. Much of what the couple did on the trip is compressed into twelve very short paragraphs at the end of the chapter presented as moments which they would remember. The reader will note how concrete and selective the material in the following paragraph is:

We were eating sole at Crawford's in Edinburgh; poking around Mrs. Hay's shop below John Knox's house, hunting for four-sided egg cosies; exploring that fabulous, fairy-tale Castle on the rock. Once again, we were watching the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders swinging down the cobblestone street from the Castle, with pipes screaming, and Peter roaring in my ear, "Did you ever see so grand a sight?"¹

Picturesque verbs suggesting present tense, like "poking," "swinging," "screaming," and "roaring," carry the thought along quickly and economically.

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1. Catherine Marshall: A Man Called Peter, p. 94.

In order to make her story energetic, Mrs. Marshall used simple words and simple style. And, of course, she wrote of the familiar, because she was telling about her own household. The modern American reader recognizes immediately the easy, conversational style of a paragraph such as this one:

He did not have to twist my arm to persuade me. I had found my heart's home, and I knew it. So the decision was made. We would be married in early November, in my home Church, the First Presbyterian Church of Keyser, West Virginia. Peter went back to Atlanta in the mood of a knight returning victorious from battle. The only catch was that, for a time, he had to be a somewhat restrained knight. There always remained the danger of gossip.¹

The longest sentence in this paragraph has nineteen words, while one has but five words.

In order to make her story subtle, Mrs. Marshall restrained its emotional content and characterized her husband by his words and actions. At what is perhaps the high point of sorrow in the book, she lets a recital of material objects carry the tone. She writes of inspecting their summer cottage, just after Peter's death:

Each room spoke of him; his presence was everywhere. In the hall closet was one of his summer hats, the one whose blue band had faded to an intriguing shade of lavender. Under his bed were his old white shoes, the pair he used for garden work, with a pair of blue socks still stuffed inside. I held one of the shoes in my hand and thought, "Now I understand those words, 'O memories, that bless and burn,' O God, how it hurts!"²

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1. Ibid., p. 65.
2. Ibid., p. 250.

Mrs. Marshall characterizes her husband by telling what he did and what he said. In recording his conversations, she even tries to capture some of his Scotch brogue for the reader occasionally. When he was about to meet the Committee on Pastor of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, he blurted out to his wife:

Catherine, I'm scar-r-ed -- scar-r-ed to death. Perhaps I should never have accepted this church. Suppose I can't deliver the goods? Suppose they don't like me after all? What if...¹

When the author does venture to offer a personal comment about her husband, she fortifies her words immediately with concrete evidence for what she is claiming. Thus she writes: "His idealism not only 'soared through mother-of-pearl skies on frigates of romance' but also stooped to embrace health examinations, insurance policies, and budgets."²

For the most part, Mrs. Marshall lets the reader hear her husband's marvelous poetic speech and lets him see the great zest of the man. The latter is clear in such humorous and subtle touches as this paragraph:

Another of Peter's requirements was that all furniture had to be sturdy. That meant it must not wobble when he threw his full one hundred and ninety pounds against it. Many a furniture salesman must have held his breath as his furniture underwent this earthshaking test.³

But A Man Called Peter is more than an economical,

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1. Ibid., p. 78.
2. Ibid., p. 70.
3. Ibid., p. 109.

energetic, subtle biography in the bestselling class. Both the author and the one of whom she writes believe in God, in Jesus Christ, in divine guidance, in resorting to prayer, in personal fellowship with the Father and Son. These themes are woven into the story with naturalness and ease. The Marshall family was a Christian family, and the Marshall story is a Christian one. Therefore, the one who would communicate a Christian message in twentieth century America can learn from Mark and Mrs. Marshall how to present it in an appealing and convincing manner.

D. The Qualities in Other Selected Christian Writings

The Christian works of Clive Staples Lewis, John Bertram Phillips, and Chad Walsh have enjoyed considerable popularity in modern America. According to Guy Brown, religious editor of The Mac Millan Company, their sales rate is very high.

A study of their works is important to the one who wishes to communicate Christian ideas. Each of them has written books which are not biographical or fictitious. Primarily apologetic and philosophical, the books nevertheless exhibit appealing economy, energy and subtlety.

Lewis has a marvelous facility for following up sentences expressing generalities with ones which bring a compelling concreteness to the ideas. Here are a few examples from Mere Christianity:

The second thing to get clear is that Christianity has not, and does not profess to have, -a detailed programme for applying "Do as you would be done by" to a particular society at a particular moment... When it tells you to feed the hungry it does not give you lessons in cookery.¹

But I wonder whether people who ask God to interfere openly and directly in our world quite realize what it will be like when He does. When that happens, it is the end of the world. When the author walks on to the stage the play is over.²

What I call "My wishes" become merely the desires thrown up by my physical organism or pumped into me by other men's thoughts or even suggested to me by devils. Eggs and alcohol and a good night's sleep will be the real origins of what I flatter myself by regarding as my own highly personal and discriminating decision to make love to the girl opposite me in the railway carriage.³

Phillips uses a simple style: short sentences and easily understood words. The reader will see them in this typical passage:

Christ's answer is quite unequivocal. He is 'the Father.' When we hear this familiar truth we nearly always read back into God's Character what we know of fatherhood. This is understandable enough, but it reverses the actual truth. If God is 'the Father,' in Nature and Character and Operation, then we derive (if we are parents) our characteristics from Him.⁴

He, too, can discuss religious problems in highly vivid sentences. In discussing the problem many people have of understanding how God can hear and answer all the many prayers offered to Him, he has this sentence: "That may be because their mental picture is of a harassed

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1. Clive Staples Lewis: Mere Christianity, p. 64.
2. Ibid., p. 50.
3. Ibid., p. 174.
4. John Bertram Phillips: Your God Is Too Small, p. 82.

telephone operator answering callers at a switchboard of superhuman size."¹

Chad Walsh displays, not only economy and energy, but many touches of subtlety. His depiction of a Christian home impresses on the reader's mind far more than the words themselves actually say:

Christianity is so much a part of the family's daily living that you could pay them a visit and not be able to put the difference into words, except to say that there was something spontaneous, joyous and out-reaching in the atmosphere. Investigating further, you would find that the parents and the children go to church together; that God is a living friend, not a Gestapo chief; that the smallest children have been taught to pray as naturally as to reach for the peanut butter; that in a very quiet and unconscious way the family has gradually become a province of the universal Church.²

Other works by Lewis which demonstrate one or more of the qualities are Miracles, The Problem of Pain, The Screwtape Letters and The Great Divorce. Any one of these might be contrasted with the same author's The Abolition of Man, which is more scholarly and less typical of writing which has wide American appeal.

Other works by Phillips which show the qualities are Plain Christianity, Making Men Whole and Appointment With God.

Stop Looking and Listen and Early Christians of the Twenty-first Century are other contributions by Chad Walsh which show traces of economy, energy and subtlety.

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1. Ibid., p. 38.

2. Chad Walsh: Campus Gods on Trial, p. 3.

Most of the books written by George Arthur Buttrick and Elton Trueblood exhibit the qualities, also.

E. Summary

This chapter considered the question as to whether or not Christian messages could be written so as to display the qualities of economy, energy and subtlety which contribute so much to the popularity of modern bestsellers. An examination of the book of Mark was undertaken to discover whether this disciple's life of Christ exemplified the qualities. The study noted that by using concrete language and by being selective in his material, Mark produced an economical book; by using a simplified style and writing of familiar scenes, he produced an energetic book; and by restraining sentimentality while characterizing Christ through His conversations and actions, he produced a subtle book.

A similar examination of a modern bestseller which handled a Christian theme, A Man Called Peter, was done. It showed that Catherine Marshall, the author, had used the same techniques and, in so doing, had produced similar qualities. The qualities in no way obscured the Christian ideas which ran throughout the biography.

A less detailed study of a number of books communicating Christian truths in non-biographical, non-narrative styles was made. These books by C. S. Lewis, J. B. Phillips, and Chad Walsh make use of the techniques and enjoy a high selling rate.

Thus, books with decidedly Christian themes, including one book of the Bible, demonstrated that the one who wishes to communicate a Christian message in modern America can use the techniques of the secular bestseller writer.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Christians across America live under the serious commission given by their Lord, Jesus Christ, to share the good news they have learned about Him with their fellow men. The commission is by no means simple, largely because the audience to whom the Christian speaks is made up of unwilling or indifferent hearers. Hence, the problem which looms ever more pressing upon the Christian community is: how can Christian truths be communicated in such a manner that they will capture the attention and enlist the interest of the lethargic and the ill-informed?

Christian leaders are becoming more and more concerned about this. Ministers and educators realize that the small proportion of time they ordinarily have for imparting the truth to the average American makes it imperative that their messages communicate effectively. Television and radio programs, movies, and secular magazines and books claim a larger share in the average American's life than do church activities.

The Christian, then, must make an impact upon his listener equal to, if not greater than, the great mass media of communication. He needs the power of the Holy Spirit and all the acumen he has to fulfill his God-given mission.

This thesis has attempted to offer the Christian some guidelines for his task. First of all, it sought to discover what qualities in modern books made them, or helped make them, so appealing to American readers that they became bestsellers. A brief look at the history of literature in this country revealed that popular writing underwent a change near the beginning of the twentieth century. Books which reached and remained on bestseller lists after 1900 had more economy, more energy and more subtlety than the widely read books prior to that date.

With the qualities isolated and defined, the study went on to ferret out what techniques writers used in order to give their writing these qualities. The use of concrete language and the discriminating selectivity of the writer were found to contribute to making the material economical. The use of simple words and sentences and the writing of familiar environments were found to contribute to making the writing energetic. And when the author restrained the temptation to be sentimental in his story and characterized those in it by their words and actions, he wrote material which was subtle.

In order to demonstrate how the techniques contributed to the creation of the qualities, a contrasting literary study was set up. Three known bestsellers in America prior to 1900, Pamela, The Vicar of Wakefield, and Far From the Madding Crowd were examined. So also were three bestsellers

after 1900: Arrowsmith, Mrs. Miniver and The Old Man and the Sea.

In that the writing in the first three books used vague words and showed little selectivity, the works were not economical. In that they used stilted grammar and ornate words while telling of experiences remote to the author's life, the works were not energetic. And in that the literature was overly sentimental and sprinkled with the author's opinion of his characters, the works were not subtle.

But economy, energy and subtlety permeated the three later bestsellers. The striking contrasts enabled the reader to understand the techniques and qualities better.

Finally, the study attempted to show that the same techniques could be used effectively in composing Christian messages. The Book of Mark was examined and it was established that this Gospel had economy, energy and subtlety. The same techniques as given in Chapter Two were what gave the Book these qualities.

A similar analysis of a modern Christian bestseller, A Man Called Peter, revealed that it was invested with the three appealing qualities. Books of a non-biographical, non-narrative nature, like the popular writings of C. S. Lewis, J. B. Phillips and Chad Walsh showed traces of economy, energy and subtlety also.

The conclusion of the study is: the Christian com-

municator, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, will have a better chance of arousing and holding his audience if he uses the techniques outlined in this study in composing his message, because he will be giving his message economy, energy, and subtlety which appeal to the modern American mind.

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