

Dear Brother in Christ,

As the synod's publisher, we at Northwestern Publishing House have an opportunity to see, by the nature of our ministry, some of the disturbing changes in the overall Christian publishing world. It is commonly held that what people read often reflects what they believe and what people read often in turn *shapes* what they believe. We know that the power of the Holy Spirit creates and strengthens faith through God's Word. We must also acknowledge the evil power that Satan can exert through the words of man.

With this in mind, I am appealing to you to gain a greater awareness of the ever-expanding mass of books promoted as "Christian" that surround our members in the world they live in today. You may have recognized the efforts by news and entertainment sources to dilute the definition of Christianity by categorizing it with other religions or marginalizing it as simply "spirituality." At the same time, book publishers have broadened the definition of Christianity to encompass self-realization, inspiration, self-help prayer procedures, and "paying it forward."

So-called Christian publishing has embraced this shift in an effort to cast the broadest net, appeal to itching ears, and capture the greatest market share possible. We should not be surprised by this given the fact that the two largest Christian publishers are now owned by an international secular media conglomerate with revenues of more than \$8.6 billion.

Recent visits to the places our members shop reveal the vast number of "Christian" books (1.2 million on Amazon) and the troubling array of what is considered Christian by the publishing community. Consider the following shelved in the *Christian Living* section at Barnes & Noble along with their back cover descriptions:

In The Heart of Christianity This world-renowned Jesus scholar and bestselling author shows us, as today's thinking Christians, how to discover a life of faith by reconceptualizing familiar beliefs. Being born again, for example, is a call to radical personal transformation. Talking about the kingdom of God means that you have committed your life to the divine values of justice and love. And living the true Christian way is essentially about opening one's heart—to God, and to others.

The First Love Story: Adam, Eve, and Us From this *New York Times* bestselling author comes a revelatory journey across four continents and 4,000 years exploring how Adam and Eve introduced the idea of love into the world, and how they continue to shape our deepest feelings about relationships, family, and togetherness.

Since antiquity, one story has stood at the center of every conversation about men and women. One couple has been the battleground for human relationships and sexual identity. That couple is Adam and Eve. Yet instead of celebrating them, history has blamed them for bringing sin, deceit, and death into the world.

In this fresh retelling of their story, *New York Times* columnist and PBS host Bruce Feiler travels from the Garden of Eden in Iraq to the Sistine Chapel in Rome, from John Milton's London to Mae West's Hollywood, discovering how Adam and Eve should be

hailed as exemplars of a long-term, healthy, resilient relationship. At a time of discord and fear over the strength of our social fabric, Feiler shows how history's first couple can again be role models for unity, forgiveness, and love.

Radical Spirit: 12 Ways to Live a Free and Authentic Life Feeling burnt-out from life, strung-out from social media, and put out by a society that always wants more from you? Beloved nun and social activist Joan Chittister, who appeared on Oprah's Super Soul Sunday, offers a practical, character-building, and inspirational guide to help you take control of your emotional life and redirect your spiritual destiny.

Jump: Take the Leap of Faith to Achieve Your Life of Abundance #1 *New York Times* bestselling author (and host of Family Feud) Steve Harvey helps you engage the Divine Spirit within you to find your life's desire and use your own imagination to make your life's vision a reality.

Imagine Heaven: Near-Death Experiences, God's Promises, and the Exhilarating Future That Awaits You Heaven is on everyone's mind. All of us long to know what life after death will be like. For decades bestselling author John Burke has been studying accounts of people who have had near-death experiences (NDEs). While not every detail of individual NDEs correlate with Scripture, Burke shows how the common experiences shared by thousands of survivors clearly point to the God of the Bible and the exhilarating picture of heaven he promises.

Imagine Heaven is an inspirational journey through the Bible's picture of heaven, colored in with the real-life stories of heaven's wonders. Burke compares gripping stories of NDEs to what Scripture says about our biggest questions of heaven: Will I be myself? Will I see friends and loved ones? What will it look like? What is God like? What will we do forever? What about children and pets? This book will propel readers into an experience that will forever change their view of the life to come and the way they live life today. It also tackles the tough questions of heavenly reward and hellish NDEs. Anyone interested in NDEs or longing to imagine heaven more clearly will enjoy this fascinating and hope-filled book.

The Power of Silence: Against the Dictatorship of Noise In this book, Cardinal Sarah has only one aim, which is summed up in this thought: "Silence is difficult but it makes a human being able to allow himself to be led by God. Silence is born of silence. Through God, the silent one, we can gain access to silence. And a human being is unceasingly surprised by the light that bursts forth then. Silence is more important than any other human work. For it expresses God. The true revolution comes from silence; it leads us toward God and others so as to place ourselves humbly and generously at their service."

And others:

Hemp/Marijuana/Cannabis: God's Sacrament, The Holy Bible, and You!
The 40 Day Prayer Challenge: Unlocking the Power of Partnered Prayer

The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope
Chicken Soup for the Soul: Dreams and Premonitions

Clearly the authors of prosperity theology, self-theology (Joel Osteen among others), and “power thoughts” books have now been joined by a dizzying array of false doctrine and manipulated religious dogma.

Adding to the confusion, housed next to *Christian Living* is *Comparative Religions* with titles like:

The Islamic Jesus and

God Without Religion: Questioning Centuries of Accepted Truths Why is the reason for God also the reason for no religion? What can one person do to increase awareness and understanding? What is behind religious conflict today?

Disillusioned with organized religion, millions of people are turning to secular humanism, neo-atheism, New Age thinking, Eastern religious practices, and mysticism while others retreat from spirituality altogether. A more satisfying and transformative option is to embark on a quest to discover what is real to you. Using time-tested tools of investigation into your own sense of self, you can examine your present beliefs, explore the nature of reality, and ultimately expand your identity and awareness.

Step by step, *God Without Religion* offers a bridge between organized religion and self-realization for anyone questioning traditional dogma or its legacy of divisiveness. It also assists in overcoming limitations and notions of exclusivity promoted by modern-day movements.

Adjacent to *Christian Living* are three full shelving fixtures signed prominently with the categories of *Self-Transformation, Divination and Dreams, Tarot, Supernatural and Mystical Philosophies, Paganism, Shamanism, Wicca, and Ancient Mysteries and Lost Knowledge.*

Perhaps you are surprised by the types of books that pass for “Christian” today and the growth in the number of books promoting false beliefs. Or perhaps you have become aware of this trend in recent years. In either case, it is critical that we acknowledge the fact that our WELS members are surrounded by false teaching when they shop for books that they hope will be a source of spiritual nourishment for themselves or others. Unaware, they may be influenced by views that, at best, do not align with what they hear in church on Sunday. At worst, these false teachings may lead them astray.

What then can you do? First, you can pray for a spiritual revival among Christian publishers, grounded in the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Second, we encourage you to make your church members aware of the role NPH plays as our synod’s publishing ministry. As you know, NPH works diligently to ensure the books and materials it makes available are trustworthy. The books developed through NPH are written by our synod’s pastors and professors. The books we carry

that are published by others are thoroughly reviewed by WELS pastors to ensure they align with our theology and doctrine.

We at NPH often struggle with making our WELS members aware of the books we develop for them. It is financially impossible for NPH to reach every member of our church body directly with information regarding books that may be a spiritual blessing for them. Our only way to effectively reach them is through you, their pastor. Moreover, you may be the only person in their life that they can trust to guide them to Christian resources that will help strengthen their faith. Please consider the important role you play in ensuring your flock is guided toward truth-filled, Christ-centered, theologically and doctrinally sound books and materials. Today more than ever before, those both weak and strong in your care need your guiding hand as they are surrounded by a sea of false doctrine peddled as Christian truth.

May God bless the work you do every day to spread the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Your fellow servant,

Bill Ziche
President, NPH

P.S. If you haven't recently, I encourage you to take time to visit Amazon or stop by Barnes & Noble to see for yourself what our WELS members are exposed to under the banner of Christian books.