

In our machine, mechanominded civilization, machine-feeding is the basic commercial activity, sucking in vast quantities of both replaceable and irreplaceable natural resources and spewing out floods of "products." Bookpresses roll out a hundred thousand hardbacks and paperbacks a year, and suck into themselves at the other end of the process (1) forests and (2) authors [at present, six publishers have asked manuscripts from me, to feed my brains into their machines]. At the post-product stage, \$ must flow on a circuit back to pay for what the machines eat (viz., paper and writers), and those dollars come from dreamers who've been persuaded [by external and internal sanctions] to release the \$ in hope of reading and profiting from the books. But since the pressures to buy the presses' products exceed the time available to read the books, most people who aspire to life-long learning and reading-enjoyment carry within them a guilty weight of books unread and requiring space and dusting. This thinksheet tries to speak to this lamentable scene and condition.

1. Almost no books now being published are worth reading. Most of them are only bloated articles, expanded to meet the publisher's size need (e.g., 96 or 126pp.) --and so taking from the public more \$ and hours. Better you should read the essence in great periodical literature and in abstracting services. (Every mo. I read BPR, which thumbnails all books printed the mo. before, and does so by subject; ask any librarian to see this....Make your own decisions as to which periodicals are for you; I read about forty superficially--but, outside my own field (primarily biblical-theological), I read thoroughly only NEWSWEEK, CHRISTIAN CENTURY, CHRISTIANITY TODAY, SOJOURNERS, PSYCHOLOGY TODAY, and NEW REVIEW OF BOOKS AND RELIGION....The abstracting services I depend on are RELIGIOUS AND THEOLOGICAL ABSTRACTS and N.T. ABSTRACTS; together, they miss nothing of any significance published anywhere in the world in the religion field).

2. When tempted to buy a book, ask yourself (1) whether you've been tempted to read a book on this subject before, and if you've yielded to the temptation, (2) whether you've read the book(s) you already have on the subject. Further, ask yourself whether you have what, in sex matters, Victorians called "honorable intentions" toward the book: do you want to live with it, or only play with it? If the latter, use a library's copy. If you decide you want to own it so you can mark it and refer to it in future and/or share it with others, ask yourself how long this extended use will continue: is the book of permanent or only of passing value? Remember: Everything you own you own you right back; commitment is enslavement (and commitment to God is the only enslavement which is perfect freedom). Atop this argument from the past is today's call for the simplification of life, an ecological call atop the permanent Christian challenge to ownership ("riches"). Finally, before buying the book, use your encyclopedia resources to see whether they satisfy your hunger for knowledge/wisdom/skill on that book's subject. General encyclopedias (the new ENCY.BRIT. is a breakthrough in self-education); your Bible dictionary and concordance; Alan Richardson's A THEOLOGICAL WORD BOOK OF THE BIBLE, maybe also OXFORD DICTIONARY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH. As for general information, I usu. hit first my Eng.dictionaries, then the one-vol. COLUMBIA ENCYCLOPEDIA.

3. Classics are usu. your best way to go. If a person asks me about a new book in my fields, almost always I can refer to a classic far better covering the concern which sparked the person's interest in the new book. The world's fundamental classics (otherwise known as "sacred literature"), THE GREAT BOOKS and THE GREAT IDEAS (on which I've taught many courses). Read yourself through this paperback: THE READER'S COMPANION TO WORLD LITERATURE [Mentor], and discover the classics you'd like to read.

4. I've given up publishing bibliographies because (1) the task is endless and (2) it's better to help persons become bibliophiles [discriminating book-choosers] on their own in the light of the gospel and perceived personal/societal needs.