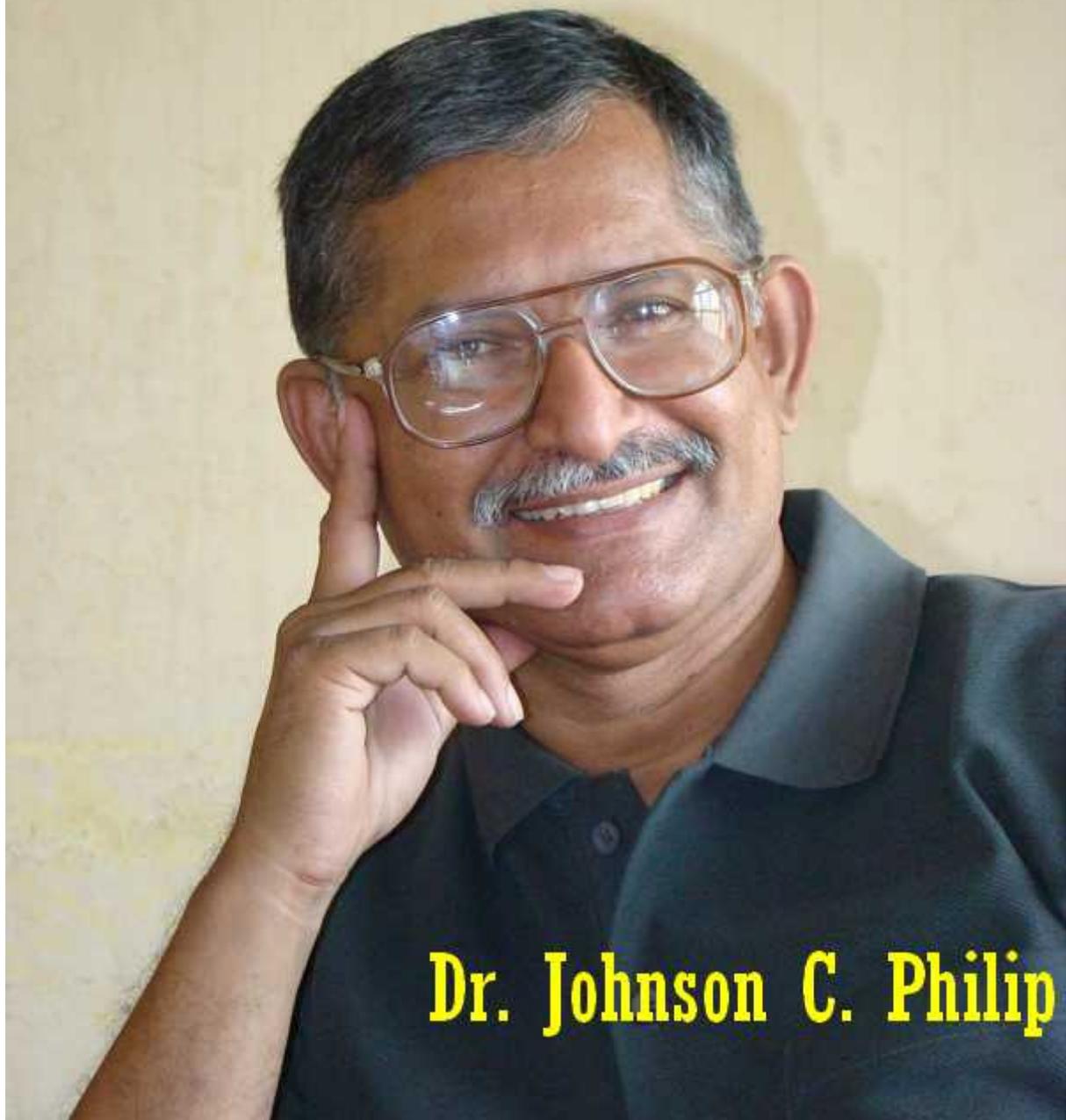


So You Want To Write?

A Manifesto For Christian Writers



Dr. Johnson C. Philip

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So you want to be the next Christian writer? Or you have been toying with the idea of writing? Congratulations! You are in good company!

Christian communicators always used to be writaholics -- that also in generations when writing tools were not abundant. The Church Father alone wrote so much, that even after most of it perished due to the passage of time and ravages of nature, more than thirty volumes of books are needed to compile just the fragments discovered so far. That is not all, if the writings of contemporary Christians is taken into account, the number of volumes might become two to five times that number.

The above statistics is only about Christian writings in the first four centuries. The books that they wrote in the 16 centuries after that period now number in millions upon millions. Christian communicators are known for their flair for writing. They wrote quality works on a range of topics beginning from the family up to Systematic Theology. They also wrote philosophical works and epics. Surprisingly the principles laid down in many of these books continue to amaze the modern man for the theological wisdom in these tomes.

Listen, you can be the next immortal Christian writer, provided you know the why and how of the subject. That is precisely what I will introduce in this book, and after that you have a range of more advanced books written by me which you can read to hone your skills to climb the next few rungs.

Why In The World Should You Write

People dream of an income in millions as soon as they think of writing. That is putting the cart before the horse. This cart will not move! Only a microscopic minority makes millions and even they do not write for making money. The day money becomes their primary source of inspiration, or even the primary aim, they will see the checks vanishing. Money is only a good and highly desirable by-product of writing for a totally different purpose, and that purpose is "a passion to create something of enduring value". Try to reverse the process, and you will lose both the passion as well as money.

Let me illustrate this principle from an experience in my life. I was born the curious type of child who wanted to learn and do everything at once. Since most things that I did, such as taking apart toys that fell to me, was casual and easy, I never learnt the importance of goal-setting and discipline. For me it was all learning through exploration, and not learning through disciplined training for one does not need such training to take apart mechanical contraptions. Meanwhile, I was overly fascinated by everything new and finally when I was in the eighth standard I

became excited about typewriting. I too wanted my fingers to fly swiftly like those of my uncle who was clocking 60-80 words per minute on his machine.

My middle-class family could not afford the five rupees per month one had to pay to the Typewriting Institute in the 1960's. After much pleading and persuasion my father reluctantly agreed to send me, provided I was diligent. He kept advising me that to master typewriting I needed more self-discipline than what I had. Finally that moment arrived, I was seated in front of the most antiquated machine that I had ever seen and I was instructed to type one key at a time. I obeyed him implicitly as long as he stood near my table watching over my shoulders. No sooner he went to his seat, I assumed myself as my uncle, trying to do 80 words per minute. That episode lasted all of the next ten seconds and all the typewriter-hammers got entangled with each other. The instructor came running to me and gave me a good piece of his mind and asked me to concentrate on learning the letters, one key at a time.

During those days my instructor, and also my father, told me repeatedly that my sole aim should be accuracy of typing, and not speed. I complied as long as the instructor looked at me, and did what I wanted when I was not supervised. They said speed would automatically follow accuracy, but never for moment did I stop to believe in their wisdom or insight. I knew that I could make myself accurate if I could simply pick up speed first. Thus the 'hide and seek' with my instructor continued, who eventually gave up the last vestiges of his hope to teach or train me. This gave me so much freedom to do what I wanted that at the end of two months I was exactly where I began on day one. The summer vacation was over and my furious father vowed never to send me to type-writing school, or to any vocational training for that matter. I was devastated because I could not at that time comprehend the basic problem with me.

I was in the eight standard at that time. Many thing happened to me in my school senior years and early college days. By the time I did my Masters I was a highly disciplined person and desired to learn typewriting again. My father would not budge but this time a cousin of mine paid the fees for six months. This time I fully concentrated on accuracy of typing, and nothing else. At the beginning of the third month everyone was stunned by my speed. I even got access to a typewriter that my father had purchased recently.

That was three decades ago, but the 60+ words per minute that I had acquired then has provided me my bread and butter as a writer all these years. Since I worked with the singular goal of accurate typing, I acquired both accuracy as well as unimaginable speed. I had to learn this lesson the hard way, but I hope you will have better luck.

Let us return to the question we started with. What is the purpose of writing? The answer is: One should write so as to craft the most beautiful and authentic piece of writing on the subject one writes. If it is a novel, then one has to put his body and soul into crafting that piece of fiction. Many do, and their work rises above all the other novels. If it is a piece of technical writing, they craft it in such a manner that people read it as though they are reading a story. People do not read these works, rather they savor them.

If you write because you have something definite to say, beginning with short-

stories upto a philosophical topic, and if you work at it to say it in the most well-crafted expressions, your writing will surely have an impact beyond your wildest imagination. It will transform lives-the result of your hard work.

The same is true with a work of non-fiction. Instead of merely writing it, you should craft it as a unique piece of workmanship. Once you do that, you no longer have to invite people to the book. The book itself will do that job even while you are sleeping. In essence, you should write for pleasure and self-expression, exactly the way the master-craftsman pours his soul into each of his creations. Never will you regret doing that, and all the other goodies will automatically follow you.

What Is The Benefit Of This Toil

People from around the world flock to Delhi to see a tower made of mere stones. They also rush to Agra to see a mausoleum that is several centuries old. In fact there are thousands of places around India where people visit structures not inhabited by people for centuries or even millennia. Why do intelligent and busy people shell out a fortune and unbelievable amounts o time to visit these places that are often inhabited only by vultures and bats? The simple answer is, each of these structures is an unusual creation of men who wanted to make something unique.

There is only one Kutub Minar and only one Taj Mahal because the creator of each one had decided that it had to be unique. And unique these structures turned out not only for the generation for which it was created but also for the centuries and millennia that followed. A unique creation of any kind and any type fills the creator with pride, the observers with awe, and everyone with joy. Compared to old monuments, this statement is much more true of a book or an article put together with the same skill and commitment.

Whenever I bring home a copy of Phantom, Mandrake, Tarzan, Tintin or Asterix, there is always a fight for the first privilege to read it. Their creators are all gone, but the creations continue to fascinate and entertain generation after generation of readers worldwide. The Capital of Marx, The Origin Of Species of Darwin and the Humanist Manifesto have turned the world upside down. The same can be said of older works like Pilgrims Progress of John Bunyan, Principia of Newton, and the code of Hammurabi because each one was a classic.

Writing is hard work, and good writing demands one to toil day and night. It is said that good writing is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration. One cannot improve that statement either in principle or in reality. The result of such toil is a monument that is totally different in essence from common works.

Ancient monuments speak to visitors only when someone explains the history to them, but books are both the monument as well as the guide to it's readers. A guide that does not merely inform visitors, but one that educates, motivates, and transforms its readers. That is the ultimate result of that ninety-nine portion of toil. No writer has ever regretted leaving such a legacy for the generations to follow him. That is the benefit of writing, and that is why you must write.

Will Your Writings Make Any Contribution

People who commissioned the building of the Kutub Minar or the Taj Mahal were not concerned about making a "historical" contribution. Nor were the architects concerned with such things. Their vision was to create something unique, and in that process they contributed things of lasting historical value. The millions in revenue generated by tourism, and the hundreds of thousands of families that are fed and clothed by that revenue is an added blessing which the creators had never envisaged. The same is the case here, or probably much more.

Here is something more than a monument! The writer of a book leaves behind not only a monument or a legacy, but also an instrument of transformation. An instrument that speaks to people, that permeates to the deepest cellars in their hearts, that fills them with a vision, and that continually prompts them for action.

Let me give you a personal example. I was born a Sanguine, a guy interested in everything, but who cannot dwell on anything for a sufficient period to master it. A jack of all trades but master of none. My first attempt at learning typewriting was a failure. But then my first attempt at learning to play violin was a disaster. The teachers and students at the music school heaved a sigh of relief when I quit after one full year of efforts at becoming the next Mozart.

From the day I started to crawl and upto that fateful moment during my first year graduation I had left a trail of 'misfortunes' and a lot of innocent people around me with ulcers. As the last straw, one fine day a girl, my junior gave me a book. She told me that the book tells people how to discover their basic nature prompting them to spot one's weakness so as to maximize one's life span. I was reluctant, but she persuaded me to read it. It took me only one day to read the entire book, but the impact has lasted my whole life-time.

I had a dream from my childhood. A dream to become one like the heroes I had read about, particularly one like Thomas Alva Edison. The book this girl gave made it clear to me that I was born with the most undisciplined and restless temperament and that I would not amount to anything if I did not learn to tame my restlessness. It was a simple book, but it communicated its message so clearly that I was persuaded. The message had such a tremendous impact that I was transformed to become a successful writer before my graduation. The undisciplined Sanguine was now the epitome of discipline and hard work. My articles got published in numerous magazines. So much so that by the time I completed my Post-Graduation, based on my uncountable articles I won a scholarship to visit Singapore to study journalism. Some of the finest faculty known internationally were the teachers. I did not have to pay a cent, went there with a small bag with three pairs of clothes, but returned with a very large suitcase (purchased from Singapore) full of goodies for my family.

All this happened because of a single book about 180 pages, that transformed me. God only knows how many thousands of non-disciplined folks like me were transformed by that single title! I have so far presented around fifty copies of that book to family and friends, and each time I was gratified by the testimonials of transformed recipients.

I learnt this lesson the hard way, but eventually my life became so ordered that my

family and friends were amazed, and then something happened unexpectedly. I attended a book-fair and purchased a book on discount. The title was, "Ordering Your Private World". No sooner had I read the first paragraph that the book gripped me. I could not lay it down even for food. The sentences engulfed my heart like flames. The book probed deep into my heart, pointing to the right things that I did and, most importantly, things that I was not doing right. Each page lit a wildfire in my mind. I imbibed the message so firmly that I continue to feel it decades after reading it.

I had a fresh look at my life and I decided to order it further. It became a daily activity for me. Today I am what I am because of a number of books, but the two books I mentioned above left the greatest and the most lasting impact of them all. I can point you to a hundred people who would say the same thing -- that books transformed them in unbelievable ways. Lumps of clay were turned into masterpieces which people long after.

Books are no ordinary things. They are not merely paper and ink. Nor should one ever foolishly think that way. Books are a consuming fire that can penetrate deep into human hearts to bring out the best in them. They can keep giving life to many even after yours is over. Your book or article can do the same to many, no doubt about it.

On What Topics Should You Write

Interestingly, it is not only "How To Win Friends" types of books that transform people, but books of all kinds do that. Let me illustrate.

I always had a passion for Physics. However during my first year of graduate studies, I came across a set of three books in the Library titled Feynman Lectures in Physics. One month of reading the first two volumes, and I was never the same person. Till then physics always interested me, but now physics excited me. I developed a life-long commitment not only to learn physics, but also to teach it using the most absorbing methods. Ask any of my students and they will tell you, "Dr. Philip teaching physics in a most simple manner, and one feels like as though he is listening to a story." A good amount of credit to my success in teaching goes to Feynman's books that showed me that the teaching of physics can rival story telling. As I write this book I am waiting for the latest edition of Feynman. I ordered them because I want to recharge myself for physics communication.

Obviously, a book or article on any subject under the sun can transform people, provided it is crafted as a work of love.

Most people dread physics and astronomy, but Hawking's 'A brief history of time and eternity' changed that to a pleasure. Who knows how many good teachers will be born after reading this book. "Freedom is Not Free" is a recent book by an Indian author that has completely transformed many young people whom I know personally. Books on any and every subject have the capacity and power to transform people. A book on Indian Classical Music might stimulate a man to do a substantial contribution in that field, a book on Education might motivate a man to become a great educationist, a book on Coins might encourage a man to become the greatest numismatist the world has seen, or a book on Excellence might result

in a thousand people who go on to excel in two thousand areas of life and profession.

Let us look at the Christian sphere. I mentioned two books that transformed me. Both are Christian books. The first one is Spirit Controlled Temperament (Tim LaHaye) and the second one is Ordering Your Private World (Gordon McDonald). Your book can be the next. LaHaye and McDonald are people exactly like you and me, and the God who used them can use me and you also with the same effectiveness.

Thus there is no topic under the sun which needs to be ignored. Every topic ever thought up by man invites people to write on them. The moment a dedicated writer crafts his masterpiece on that subject, a thousand shall be motivated to arise and make a contribution in that field. Thus you can pick up any subject whatsoever that fascinates you and craft your book around it, and it will touch people.

Who Will Publish Your Writings?

Many writers and potential writers are intimidated by this question, though no writer should ever ask this question till the actual process of submission is at hand. Believe me, the process of crafting and polishing your writings is one hundred times more important than the question of who would publish it.

They never asked who shall visit Taj Mahal. They were possessed with the single idea that this building should become the greatest mausoleum in the world. They knew that all other questions are secondary, and also that once they made it as they envisaged, the whole world would fall one upon the other to see it.

Isaac Asimov was a chemistry professor in one of the big universities, but his heart was in writing. He used to craft his books with such precision and passion that publishers used to beg him to get his favor in the form of a manuscript. Eventually he left his Chemistry professorship and moved into full-time book writing. He published at the average rate of ten books per year till the end of his life. There was no shortage of publishers, and the only limiting factor was his human body and mind that reached its limit at ten books per year.

The greatest craftsmen in the world never worry about the statue, the souvenir, the painting that they craft. The other day I read about a magazine that prints only ten copies, and each copy is priced at close to one hundred thousand. Yet there are buyers. The same will be the fate of your writing if you refuse to be distracted by non issues.

Human hunger for knowledge knows no boundaries. Those who publish magazines and books know they can match that hunger with the right product, their magazine will sell. It will sell like hot cakes, and what editor does not want that to happen! Thus there is no shortage of places where one can get oneself published. However , if you are more interested in who is going to publish you, then you are placing the cart before the horse. Don't do that. Invest your time and energy on producing a work, whether it be 200 words or 200,000 words, that is unique. A piece of prose into which you have poured all your energy, all your creativity, and all your insight. You will then never ever have to worry about who will be your publisher.

What If There Are Better Writers?

Many potential writers are petrified by the nagging feeling that they are newcomers in the field and that there are plenty of writers who are far better than them because of greater experience.

It is true that the work produced by a writer with lesser experience will surely differ from what is penned by a more experienced writer. But why should this petrify potential writers is for anybody's guess. More so because variety is the essence of pleasure. Life would bore people to death in a day if all the trees were the same species and of the same height and color, if all the animals were only elephants, and if all the food served in the house-hold were always only the best variety of cake.

Life does give pleasure through uniformity, but rather through diversity. The most smelly cheese is as important as the most aroma-exuding cake. The choicest cashewnut roasted with honey cannot do away with the humble home-made lemon juice. Social life would be totally boring where all men and women wore only white, even if it were the most perfect white. Substitute white with whatever color is considered the most pleasant, but even that would not make an inch of difference even if they all wear the costliest clothes but of the same color. But go to a social festival among the poorest of the poor, and the colors will cheer your heart even though what they wear is not expensive. That is because human mind craves for variety and it thrives upon that. Variety is essential for giving pleasure.

Do not ever worry about the writers who are more experienced than you. They are necessary for variety and also for setting high standards that the next generation can follow and even exceed. Variety and high standards only stimulate increased production of good material.

Further just because you are junior in the field does not automatically mean that your work necessarily has to be inferior or immature. Being junior or less experienced only means that you will have to work harder to attain your goal. But then it works the same in every field including the practice of medicine, law, or administration. Just as this does not deter juniors in those fields from working, and even from becoming the next generation of experts, the presence of more experienced writers should not deter you too as a writer.

Start writing !!

If you have ever toyed with the idea of writing, you have done well. You are on your path to greatness. Not greatness in terms of money because money should never be your primary aim for that will destroy the writer in you.

Write because you want to make a substantial contribution to science, arts, history, culture, or any subject that you love. Write fiction either to give a great amount of joy to your readers, or to leave a deep moral impact upon them. You do not have to overlook money, but you should allow money to come to you only as a byproduct. A byproduct from the work crafting great pieces of writing.

Start today, stick to it, and some day you will thank the person who introduced this ebook to you!!

PS: All craftsmen need good tools and also skill in using those tools. Writing is no exception! Be sure to download the other ebooks available on my site. They will introduce the full range of tools and will also make you skilled in using these tools.

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