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## Christian Publishing: A Panel Discussion

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# Christian Publishing:

## A Panel Discussion

The 2007 conference of the Association of Christian Librarians convened in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on the campus of Cornerstone University. Conference planners invited representatives of four prominent Christian publishers headquartered there (Baker, Eerdmans, Kregel, and Zondervan) to participate in a panel discussion on June 13. The panelists' 65-minute exchange is transcribed here in slightly abbreviated form. At the beginning of the discussion, panelists were asked to reflect on general trends in the Christian publishing industry. This led naturally to a lengthy conversation about the publishers' involvement in the creation and licensing of ebooks and other digital products. Finally, panelists were asked to address the proliferation of English Bible versions aimed at the evangelical community.

**Smith:** What trends have you observed in Christian publishing over the last ten years?

**Hillman:** One of the observations I would make is that Christian publishing is inextricably linked to the book market, so there's not publishing "here" as something that's separate from publishing "there" – the distribution of those products. So what has happened in the marketplace – changes in the Christian bookstore and distribution industry – has significantly affected publishing and how publishing is done. So as a very general observation, the most significant thing that I have seen in our business in the last ten years is how the role of the Christian bookstore and/or Christian bookseller has changed significantly. A shift from brick and mortar to click – I don't know where the mortar comes in with the "click"! – but there's a whole new distribution pattern that's emerged, and that's significantly changed how we do our work.

**Hunt:** They fall into three areas. First of all, I think that we've seen Christian publishing move from being strictly ministry to being ministry and business combined. We see retailers moving from smaller mom-and-pop shops to

the emergence of chains and associations. We see the mainstreaming of Christian publishing houses with Warner Faith, Waterbrook being owned by Random House, and Zondervan being owned by HarperCollins. Agents are playing an increasing role over the role they played ten or more years ago. Hit-driven publishing has become more of an issue, and Christian books appearing in places like Wal-Mart, Sam's, Costco, et cetera.

The second area is digital publishing. That affects the way in which we produce books, but it also puts tools in the hands of the consumers. And there's lots of publishing going on outside of us and our colleagues. There were 35 million blogs and 75,000 new blogs every day, and that has an impact upon what we do. Search technologies – you're well aware of this – we have people that are looking for phrases more than reading complete books now, more than ever, because they can do that. You have the whole change in publishing in the value equation. It used to be that you could sell \$2,000 sets of encyclopedias, and then it became \$69 encyclopedias in a CD-ROM, and now you just go to Wikipedia and you get that all for free.

And then finally, I see a shift in the consumer. There was an article recently in *Wall Street Journal* that starts off with the phrase, "You, you, you. You are special, you are. You've got everything going for you. You're attractive, witty, brilliant; *gifted* is the word that comes to mind." It's speaking about what's happening in the young generation which is coming into the workplace. We've got loads of young people who are extremely self-confident; they're writing memoirs at age 20. And you know what? Some of them are pretty good, and they're really concerned about being authentic and true and the citizen voice. And that also comes to play in changing publishing.

**Kinney:** I'll just mention two things to complement what's already been said. One I would just mention is the factor of

*Dennis Hillman*

*Mark Hunt*

*Jim Kinney*

*Jon Pott*

*Gregory A. Smith*

### AUTHOR NOTES

Dennis Hillman is Publisher for Kregel Publications, where he has served for fourteen years.

Mark Hunt is vice president and publisher of Zondervan New Media. He has been in the publishing industry for over 25 years. Mark has also been involved with two organizations that help establish indigenous Christian publishing around the world.

Jim Kinney is the editorial director of Baker Academic, one of the six divisions of Baker Publishing Group. He has been in the publishing industry for eighteen years, having spent eight years with Eisenbrauns before coming to Baker.

Jon Pott is Vice President and Editor in Chief at the William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, where he has been a member of the editorial department since 1968.

Gregory A. Smith is Administrative Services Librarian at Liberty University. His past research includes a number of forays into the relationship between Christian faith and the world of information.

consolidation. I'll just give an example from our own publishing house. The Bakers – just a family-owned company – bought Revell and Chosen in 1992, and then again in 2003 bought Bethany House. And so now you have one small company that's grown to be a pretty good-size company and has a lot of diversity. Through consolidation certain efficiencies obtain, but then also certain tensions arise.

The other factor I would mention because I work in the academic side of the Baker Publishing Group would be just simply the proliferation of information. There was a time, I think, when scholars felt they could keep up with their field, and now they just simply throw up their hands. There's no way, let's say, a New Testament person can keep up with everything that's being published in New Testament. So the question becomes for the reader, "Who has time to read everything, and then what's worth reading?" As publishers, we see that there's a little bit of a change in the reader. And we provide, I suppose, what you would call the high-quality read – it's been scrutinized and edited and prepared very professionally. Though providing high-end content, we find ourselves now in competition with somebody that throws up a thought that they had yesterday – or every thought they had yesterday – onto a Web site, and we're competing for the precious moments of reading time with that kind of information.

**Pott:** Let me try to add a few things. Religion has been one of the strongest sectors in the marketplace out there, and it continues to be, and growth is predicted for the coming year. Figures differ a little bit in that, but religious publishing is a very significant piece of the publishing picture.

Mark mentioned the digital aspect of publishing. You tend to think of it, I think, in terms of dissemination of information – digital books, ebooks, and so on. Another aspect to that is the whole prospect of short runs – short print runs through books on demand, digital publishing – which has huge implications, especially for publishers that have to do small runs such as we do – university presses and academic publishing in general.

Another thing I might mention is the consolidation of publishing. There's tremendous consolidation everywhere, and that trend continues. In the marketing side you're dealing with huge chains who do centralized buying for the entire chain. You're dealing with huge distributors – one in particular, Ingram, which buys for the vast piece of the marketplace – so all your books are, in a sense, being funneled through these large wholesale operations. That has tremendous implications; one aspect of that that we all wrestle with in quite agonized fashion sometimes is returns.

A third thing – it's related to the consolidation in a way – is the huge globalization of publishing, which should come as no surprise to you. I always joke that on a given day I probably know more about what's going on in certain offices in London than I do at Baker or Zondervan, because we are doing rights arrangements with them and so we're privy to their work. That has to do not only with editorial; it also has to do with distribution. We co-own our own distributor in England, for example, because we thought that was the most efficient way for us to get our books published in Europe.

**Smith:** The emergence of Google™ Book Search over the last couple of years has generated a variety of responses on the part of publishers. Some publishers have enthusiastically embraced Google™ Book Search and are partnering to market their content through the search engine. On the other end of the spectrum, there are those that have joined the lawsuit alleging copyright infringement. There are others that have perhaps made public statements against the library project without going so far as joining the lawsuit, and some publishers are abiding by Google's™ rules by opting out of participation in the library scanning project. What has been the response from your respective companies?

**Pott:** I don't have much to say on the subject. We have not participated in that, and that has to do, I think, in part, with just our corporate culture. We tend to be adventuresome, we'd like to think, on the intellectual side and idea side. We haven't always been as keenly observant of, and interested in, the dissemination side. But it is something we keep our eye on. To my

knowledge – I wish I had someone from the marketing department who could speak more up to date on this – we have so far drawn the line there.

**Kinney:** We've entertained their proposal but we have chosen not to participate at this point simply because we're trying to determine how to protect the intellectual property that we manage for our authors. Could I just say two things – a little bit of background information? One is that, as a publisher, we see our job as connecting authors with readers, and so we're not necessarily tied to a particular technology for doing so. However, there is a technology in place that's been around for 500 years or so that many of our business paradigms are built around, which is printing. It's not that we're slavishly bound to that, as much as we want to see how paradigms emerge in the future that make economic sense for us. As an example, we might produce a reference book that has a budget of \$100,000 – even \$200,000 – and that's for the honing and the refinement that we're doing to try to make this high-quality information. Once we do that, we have to figure out how to get that money back (and then some, hopefully) so that we can continue doing other projects like that in the future. And right now, as a publisher, you can imagine how we're a little bit cautious about making that information available in a way that doesn't provide us with some opportunity to recover some costs.

**Hunt:** I think there was a time when publishers focused on the book, and anything that happened electronically was sort of gravy. As a whole, publishers are now realizing that the term *publishing* is much broader, and that the role that we've played if you go back twenty years, which is basically providing the capital to do the whole typesetting, inventory, distribution, et cetera, is changing – that the Internet has changed that. And, yet, the value that a publisher brings in terms of vetting content, in terms of the editorial process, is still very much an important part of publishing, and it costs. And so I think that everything that Jim was saying, I would agree with. So then when people like Google™ come in, you have to figure out, "OK, how does this fit into the new paradigm, and how do we maintain the

role that we play that adds value to this whole equation in terms of aiding the communication between the author and the final reader?"

HarperCollins – our parent company – has taken the position of saying, "We think it's important that we control the digital side of what we do, and not just sort of see that go off to someone else. So they have sought to plunge into the digital world by making their content available, but doing it under their own structure and terms in working with other publishers to do that. And Zondervan is exploring that on their coattails. So to this point we've not really signed onto the Google™ project.

**Hillman:** We have chosen to participate with Google™ in their Book Search program. I can't say that we've done that through any well-researched and thought-out process. I think everyone at this point makes some of those decisions somewhat working on intuition, hunches, and guesses. The one thing that I think is obvious pretty much to everyone, going by the comments that have already been made, is that the Web changes the value of content tremendously. The Web is like a giant, content-eating monster that has to be fed, and it devours content. The real question that no one can answer at this point is how does that devouring of content add value to the equation and reward the content provider? And that's the part of the equation that I think everyone's nervous about. If every book in the world is available on Google™ for you to search, then how does that affect the relationships between the content creator, the content shaper (who is the publisher), the content distributor, and, ultimately, the content consumer?

**Smith:** We're going to talk specifically about any electronic products that you're currently offering or that are in the pipeline that you are able to announce publicly. Let's start with Mark in that regard, since you probably have the longest history on the panel in regards to new media. Tell us what's going on – any electronic products that you are offering, regardless of the format.

**Hunt:** Well, the first step towards the digital side of things was the installation of digital systems for our editorial and typesetting processes. And for us that took place in the

mid-80s. In 1986 we began to explore what we could do with the digital archives that were the result of doing typesetting from a digital format. And by '89 we released our first sets of software that included some of our major content, and we've continued to develop that platform. In addition, we began to work in the areas of both video and audio. Now initially those were – in the case of audio – cassette and then CD. Now the fastest-growing audio area we're dealing with is digital download. We're exploring the same sorts of things with video and video curriculum. We've just signed an agreement and are involved with an online subscription service for adults and for students in terms of Bible study. And we're pretty committed to exploring what we can do to begin to pull this together in the whole area that we call "new media," and make a fairly significant investment in expanding that part of our business. Ebooks are also part of that, but we'll talk about that later, I think.

**Kinney:** As Jon mentioned earlier, culturally our company is not inclined to be out on the bleeding edge of things. That's not the Bakers' family characteristic, and that's not how they've built their business that has been around since the late '30s. But in the early '90s they began to experiment with some electronic books through the Libronix system (which back then was called Logos). So since then, we've continued to experiment with various titles through the Libronix system, which does seem to have found a readership or a market in pastors who are inclined in the electronic direction. In more recent years we've begun to experiment with some electronic books – the downloadable type of thing – but just a few titles. And so far the results have been very modest for us, so that we feel like it simply is an experiment; it isn't anything that could become a vital part of our business model yet. We'll continue to experiment, I think, in the next years. In fact, I'm always pushing us to experiment because I think that's what we have to do – you have to continue to try things, and at least be in the ballpark when things begin to shift or a paradigm begins to emerge. But I think ours will be an experimental approach for the foreseeable future.

**Pott:** Well, Baker is a lot like us and we're a lot like Baker. I would say we have a very sophisticated desktop publishing operation by now, and we were not particularly late in getting into that. I think that whole end of things runs extremely well and efficiently. We get no books in, for example – almost no books – in strictly manuscript. We always have a disk to work with, and then manipulate and code and so on. As far as releasing digital products is concerned, we have done almost none of that because we haven't felt particularly pressured to do it. Like Baker, we have licensed rights to Libronix or Logos for a number of our reference works, and we've been doing that for the last ten to twelve years – almost from the beginning. We've done that piece by piece, bit by bit, carefully, trying to ensure that it doesn't impede at all the sale of the print version, and of course there are debates about whether it actually does hurt print sales or, on balance, enhance print sales. So we've been cautious there.

All we've done so far is license products, and they do the retailing of them, unlike Baker – certainly Zondervan – who does retail their own product. That will be for us, ultimately, a question: whether we begin taking some of this stuff on board, and one could even create, say, an Eerdmans reference library. We have a lot of reference works, and we could combine them in interesting ways. We would probably have to have that electronic work done elsewhere, because we're smallish and the startup costs for things like this are enormous, and we're just not big enough to absorb that kind of thing unless we see a really secure future to invest in. We are watching the future; my guess is that eventually we will be marketing our own electronic product. Then the big question is what's the role left anymore for CD-ROMs and so on, which is, of course, how this all began.

**Hillman:** Kregel, like Baker and Eerdmans, has basically worked with licensing partnerships, and we probably work with five software producers – different companies that have different focuses. One of the areas that we've licensed a significant number of books for in the last two years has been to the handheld



market – for the Palm® and various Microsoft® handheld PDA-type electronic appliances. This summer we'll be releasing the first product that we've developed and that we will market on our own. We developed this product in conjunction with two professors – one a professor of Greek and the other a professor of Hebrew at a Christian school – who did a survey of students and realized that 80 percent of their incoming students came to college with an iPod®. It suddenly dawned on them that there was a more effective way to teach Greek and Hebrew using an iPod® than using flashcards that you drop in the parking lot and reshuffle. So this summer we're coming out with a product called *iVocab* for Greek and Hebrew, and it'll be electronic flashcard programs that incorporate both a visual of the word in Greek or Hebrew, and the English translation. If you're using the new iPod® video, it'll also have sound with it. It's cross-platform, so it will work on any phone that has video capacity, or any MPG player. It's designed to be a multi-task, kind of Swiss Army knife approach to vocabulary acquisition.

**Smith:** Mark, you have done more in the area of ebooks than most others. Tell us what's going on at Zondervan, and clarify the distinction you've previously made between electronic books and ebooks.

**Hunt:** *Ebooks* is a term that I find to be a little confusing. In its most generic sense, I suppose, it could apply to any book that's presented in a digital or electronic format. I think in its most focused and refined way, though, it refers to a handful of platforms that are broadly used as ebook platforms – things like Microsoft® Reader, Mobipocket, Adobe® Reader®, eReader for the Palm®, now the Sony® ebook Reader, and others, which all come with some sort of a digital rights management (DRM) that keeps copies from being made.

And this all came into being, in the spring of 2000, when Stephen King released his book, *Riding the Bullet*, in ebook fashion only, and Amazon jumped on board, and offered it for free as a kind of a marketing piece, and still paid the royalties to Stephen King. I think he did very well with that, and I think over 500,000 copies were sold. We've done probably

something approaching 100 ebooks, and we continue to do a few a year. And what strikes me is that with ebooks, while they're coming along, if you can sell 5,000 units, you're on the bestseller list; you're probably in the top 10. So while it's not particularly difficult to get the ebook created, it still hasn't really taken off. Probably the most basic reason is because the experience of reading with a book is a whole lot more satisfying than the experience of reading on a Palm®. And there are attempts to try to address that. And Sony®, of course, is trying to do that with its new technology, with E Ink®.

You will see Amazon making a very strong move, if you've been following the news. First of all, they're coming out with their own ebook reader, called the Kindle, that was supposed to release last fall, and then this spring, and I've seen a prototype, but I haven't seen the thing on the market yet. And they are trying to push publishers – I don't know if you all have been pressed by this yet – to sort of create all their content in this format for their device. It's very clear to me that they're trying to move not just towards the ebook delivery, but also toward audio delivery of all their content. So I think we're still in the very early stages of this technology. I think a number of things need to happen to make it a better experience, especially on the ebook side. And it remains to be seen whether this is going to really take off.

Now there's another side to ebooks that I suspect you all work with more, and that is the online collections – you know, the NetLibrary® and the Ebrary® – and what's happening there. And I think, again, from the publisher perspective you're trying to balance what is the opportunity and what is the cost in order to get there. And with all that's happening in the digital world, you can chase opportunities from sunrise to sunset and never get to all the opportunities that are there.

**Pott:** Mark talked about the fact that the ebook is really not as satisfying as a physical book. I always joke, too, that the printed book is a pretty efficient little machine. I mean, it's not hard to flip the pages, it's not hard to go back in, it's portable, it never runs out of juice; it's a pretty nice little gadget.

**Hunt:** You can actually read it during takeoff and landing, too.

**Kinney:** As I was thinking about this, it helped me to differentiate between electronic books for reading and electronic books for reference. The book for reference has very high costs and much more limited circulation possibilities. The book for reading might have relatively low costs and, if the wind blows just right, it might go crazy in terms of sales and circulation. For us to spin off an electronic version, that's all just gravy, like Mark mentioned. The book for referring to is really a different animal for us. We talked to someone from NetLibrary® recently who mentioned that the average consultation time for someone to look at a book was eight minutes. Well, they're obviously not reading the whole book; they're trying to get the bit of information they need for their research paper. That's the information that we've spent a lot of money trying to prepare and make sure that we had the right person authoring it and getting it just right. So that's the challenge, and I think you definitely want that kind of information, and we're struggling to figure out just where is that financial paradigm, but hopefully it'll emerge as the years go by.

**Smith:** In regards to our experience at Liberty University with the ebooks of the Web-based type, we don't think it's an either-or proposition. We're still acquiring almost as many print books as we did. We're also acquiring in the electronic space. I probably wouldn't disagree with what you're saying in terms of the extent to which a person accesses an ebook. We don't really see it as being, for most people, a cover-to-cover experience. But I think what we have to look at is that the technologies support different kinds of uses. I think most of us in the room would agree that in terms of the reading experience, we prefer to use ink on paper. What we're talking about with the electronic arena is that it is much more effective than ink on paper in regards to full-text search, which can be an extremely valuable proposition. It also supports copying and pasting, and under technical constraints that tend to hinder copyright abuse, that can be a very attractive feature for someone who's writing a research paper. And then lastly, with the advent of distance learning programs, it's

much more advantageous to try to support students in those programs via electronic means than with ink on paper. So I think what we're looking for is a mechanism to be able to support all of those read and search and use purposes.

**Hillman:** I think one other way to look at the question of ebooks is to look at the users and classify them. There are at least three that come to mind quickly. One is the techno-user, and that's the guy that's going to buy whatever comes out. If the Sony® book reader comes out with a new, improved screen resolution – he's going to buy it because he's a techno-person, and I say "guy" because men are most likely the market. There are also institutional uses in the medical field, insurance field, engineering, for a reader that you can take into the field. If you're an engineer working on a project, there'll be very specific uses for electronic products that will find a very welcome place among the techno-users.

The second user is the searcher, of course, and I'm not so sure that the searcher really cares about the book at all. The comment was made that the average person is looking at the source for eight minutes, and I think the other day in a meeting, someone said twelve to sixteen minutes. The searcher really doesn't care about the book as an entity; the searcher's only looking for information, and I would posit that really what those people are creating is a new class of electronic illiteracy, where books as an entity, a unit with connected and comprehensive ideas, no longer work that way. They're looking for a phrase, they're searching for a word, they're pulling a concept out of context, and they're not entering into the totality of what the author's communicating. That, I posit, is probably somewhat of a danger. And that leads to the further issue that ebooks may be a dead end, because the issue is not, "Do we need to find another way to package the book?" The bigger question is, "Are we going to have readers to buy that book in whatever package it's in because of the tremendous competition for the time?" There's video games, the Web, personal journaling on the Web log, and all kinds of competition for time that eats into the ability of people to find the simple time to read.

So the third class, after the techno and the searcher, is the pleasure reader, and I think that's the class that's most challenged – the people who get the intellectual and even the sensual joy of holding a book and reading it. I don't see that coming up among the younger group of readers. So I think that's a real concern for all of us.

**Smith:** In regards to the perception from the library community that your publishers have been reluctant to enter the ebook market, can you explain some of the factors that contribute to that reluctance? What barriers might your company face in choosing to pursue the electronic market more aggressively?

**Hillman:** I guess I would reframe it to say that publishers haven't been reluctant to pursue the electronic market. It's certain uses of electronic product that become a concern. I think libraries, particularly, have a very special concern of how to provide information to clients in a way that's fast, efficient, and accessible to them. And online resources are a great way to do that; it's very efficient, cuts out a lot of that messing with books in the stacks, and all that kind of nonsense, you know. ("Yeah, libraries, they used to have books!") From the publishers' standpoint, because we like to use up a lot of paper, bind it up, and sell it to people, the use that works best for you may not be the use that works best for us in terms of this chain of taking content and adding value, and everyone in the process derives value. It's not that publishers are reluctant to provide it electronically, it's "what's the form that it's going to be provided in, and how do we preserve value for the content provider?" Ultimately, it seems to me the tangent of history is driving content towards "everyone gets it, and everyone gets it free." If that's the way it goes, then we have to find that incentive for that person who's going to create the content and derive some value for it. So I think that's the tension that we live with.

**Kinney:** I would offer that it feels like libraries are probably not where we would be concerned about the problem. In other words, we feel that the library market is very stable and supportive; you certainly like what we do, and support what we do, and if we made something available in print and electronic, it's

quite possible that you would buy both. For us, maybe the issue with making information available electronically would be the other users – the individual owners of books. If we do a dictionary, we're quite confident that the library would buy a copy of the dictionary, and if they made it electronically available, that wouldn't really be a problem. There's actually a pretty good financial paradigm in place that can handle library distribution and circulation. It's other users that become more of an issue for us. We need a certain number of sales to recover expenses, and again, we're working on a paradigm that we've worked on for many years, and it may be that that begins to change, as Dennis suggests. We stand ready to allow paradigms to emerge and take advantage of them as they do emerge. So I don't feel like our reluctance is primarily "we don't want to serve the libraries." That's not it at all; I think, quite the opposite, we love the libraries, and we're all in this together in some ways.

**Smith:** Jim, in regards to your differentiation between users, how would the individual readers be a concern to you? Are you alluding to the possibility of infringement through file-sharing? How would libraries be a good thing for you, and yet the possibility of higher sales to individuals be a problem?

**Kinney:** For example, cooperating with NetLibrary® to provide resources to libraries – that doesn't seem to me to be much of a challenge at all for publishers, as long as the fiscal paradigm is in place. What are the expenses versus what is the return? That doesn't strike me as a real challenge for publishers, and for us, that's an area that we would like to do more exploration and experimenting in. But wider circulation in electronic form does have the potential to diminish purchasing.

**Hunt:** Publishers live with a number of tensions. And one of the tensions that doesn't exist, I think, is between publishers and librarians. We love what you all do, and we're delighted to be with you here today. But we do live with this responsibility, not just to our businesses, but also to our authors. So as we begin to work through business models that move towards electronic distribution, one of the challenges is, "How do we do this in a way that's fair to



everybody that's concerned?" Earlier I made the comment that agents have become more and more involved. I would say that agents are concerned about this as well, and this comes up in conversations that we have. Agents haven't gotten quite so much into reference materials now, but that could come. And I know that we feel – I suspect that my colleagues do as well – a serious concern to make sure that we protect the author and the work that the author has done. Because we want to be able to go back to that author and have them do another book with us in the future, and feel good about working with us.

**Smith:** Well, let me draw a question on that, and that relates to the academic market in particular. I happened to edit a collection with a scholarly press five or six years ago, which has sold 400 copies, and that's not unusual for an academic book with a limited audience. My expectation going into that was never that I was going to be making a lot of money. I mean, I wanted the publisher to play fair with me, but whatever I got was probably going to be gravy. And I suspect that for many academic authors, there's a similar expectation. Their main concern is getting their work to the audience. So correct me if I'm wrong, but are you seeing agents for academic manuscripts? And, also, at least in the case of journal literature, the academic authors are willing to give away their work, which is what has spawned the open access movement in journal publishing. So I would see what you're talking about with agents and concern for fair treatment of authors to be much more of concern for popular literature than for academic.

**Hunt:** Well I would say that there aren't a lot of agents yet on the academic side. However, I deal with a number of authors who are getting much more agent-savvy, and are really pushing back on electronic rights, and are very concerned when they get pennies on the sale of a unit, and some significant authors who basically will refuse to allow us to do anything electronically because they feel that that undercuts what they're doing. I remember being at the Society of Biblical Literature meetings (it had to be in the early 90s), and there was a session going on where one very outspoken professor was saying, "Look, I'll give up all my royalties if I can get your books for

free. I spend more on books than I ever make on royalties, so let's just cut the publishers out of this deal, and be done with it." So I don't think that academic authors are for the most part expecting to become rich off what they do, but I do think that there are a number of them that do significant reference works that, while they don't sell a lot in a given year, they sell for a long period of time, and it becomes something of an annuity, and I wouldn't want to cut them out of the equation.

**Smith:** I would say that there are probably three segments to the book market that we would look at with varying levels of interest. One would be the reference publications, which we think admit a particular kind of use and a business model that is very different from other kinds of books. And even within those other kinds of books that there would be a great distinction between academic and popular, with varying kinds of users and probably business models to follow that.

**Pott:** I think Mark is right that there is some concern to protect authors. I think you're right, too, that academic authors are the least conscious of that. Probably an even bigger factor is the one that Jim mentioned earlier, that publishers have enormous investments in these reference projects that they feel obliged to protect for their own wellbeing. I mean, it's not unusual for a reference work to be in preparation, a single volume – we have one going now, I think we've been working on for fifteen years. That's a lot of editorial money invested, and other money as well. So the publisher as a business matter needs to protect its interests there.

I agree with my colleagues here that we feel as though in some ways you're our colleagues in this. You don't need to be convinced; you're part of the same enterprise we are. And the result – I'm speaking for myself – may be a little bit that we tend to take you for granted, and so aren't as conscious of your particular needs as we ought to be. And so I hope I don't sound too fatuous in saying that I'm here partly to learn what it is that you think we can do better to help you.

The third comment I would make is that the library market is not very big. And I don't think publishers can afford to publish even

mainly for a library market, on the whole, unless they charge an enormous retail price for the product. And you, in turn, are getting squeezed on the other side; your budgets, as I understand, are not exactly getting more liberal, so it's this catch-22 situation. We – and you, by extension – need a market beyond that. I wrote to our contact person at Libronix yesterday, “You know, we license to you. How large of your market is made up of libraries?” And all the rest of you probably know the answer, and I was sort of embarrassed to ask the question. But he gracefully fielded it, and said, “Actually, relatively few.” And that's in part, he said, because their product tends to be end-user-oriented, customer-oriented. And users tend to spend quite a lot of time with this particular product, which is not done in a library. And I should have known this, you know, but suddenly a light went on: Yeah, the way things get used in libraries is quite a bit different from the way that things get used with ultimate customers.

**Kinney:** You shared your experience of a book that had a circulation of 400 copies. I worked previously at Eisenbrauns, and it was certainly a different model there. It might help for us to think of academic publishing in two different categories. One is the university press (or the European academic press) model, where it is 400 books – very high-priced, and basically for the library market. And then there's another kind. When I came from Eisenbrauns to Baker, I understood that we were doing a different kind of academic publishing, where it does have broader circulation. We are now trying to get to students, or to pastors, as well as to scholars and libraries. And we can do different things with a book – it's academic, and we want to have high standards on it, but we do expect to have a higher circulation, so that's why our prices are much lower than what you'll find from an E. J. Brill or a J. C. B. Mohr book.

**Pott:** One of the things that you're paying for on the American side is the substantial amount of editorial work that goes into projects. The European model, frankly, is not to edit very much; in fact, many European academic publishers expect practically camera-ready copy from authors. And our experience with camera-ready copy is not good.

**Smith:** A number of you have alluded to Bible reference materials. I'd like to ask how your company might respond to the news that a large denominational publisher is planning to launch a Web-based service that will allow subscribers, both individuals and libraries representing institutions, to search and read Christian reference materials online. Would your company be likely to launch a competing service? Would your company sit and wait and see what happens? Would you be interested in licensing your books for inclusion in that collection, which that company appears to be open to doing?

**Hillman:** I'd like to know what their business model is to pay for the content. It's like somebody said in a movie once: “Everybody wants to go to the party, but no one wants to stay and clean up.” Somewhere the content creator and provider have to make a living – the laborer is worthy of his hire. Where's the content coming from, how's the content producer being reimbursed, is it totally free, is it a fee to search – what's the model? For our company, we would be open to any model of something like that that works. And just to throw something out there, the most successful thing that's worked in the last few years is iTunes®, where it is a fee-for-service arrangement. You want a tune? You pay your buck. So, again, what's the model, and is it compatible with the paradigm which we're working under?

**Smith:** I can give an example from non-biblical reference resources. Oxford Reference has had an online product with a major collection of reference works, and basically what they do is allow libraries to subscribe to that content on behalf of their end users. They charge a subscription cost that's certainly less than buying the books in one year, but if a library were to subscribe to it for five or six years, they're probably paying for the cost of the books and then some. And so I think it has the potential, particularly with reference works that have a long lifespan, to be a very successful business model, and has a number of precedents in the non-Christian marketplace, and now hopefully is being imported into a marketplace that's very much of interest to this audience.

**Kinney:** I agree with Dennis. None of our companies have survived this long by simply being adamant about specific ways of doing business. We're always exploring new opportunities and new ways of doing things, and so we would be eager to talk to someone and listen to how they plan to do it. And, yeah, maybe we would watch and see a little bit, but if there's a good paradigm out there, and a good business model, and a good opportunity, we'll certainly move into it.

**Pott:** For panels like this, I keep articles that have appeared in *Publishers Weekly* or wherever else over a number of years. And I looked through some of the articles that were appearing, say, fifteen years ago, and ten years ago, as electronic publishing started to come into public eye. And it's still instructive to see how highly euphoria ran about what was going to be – about the ebook, and about all kinds of things. And I think publishers, especially those who are small, we tend not to want to make too many mistakes and to be very careful. And the startup costs – I mean, part of the answer to your question is, you need personnel, you need to devote a lot of energy to this. And where does a company decide to allocate its energies? Is it more on the editorial side? Is it more on the dissemination side? These are balancing acts that you're constantly having to do, and that accounts for a certain amount of the caution. A couple of years ago there was a panel discussion printed in *Publishers Weekly* in which a number of publishers were asked to survey what they saw as having happened in the last number of years. And they all agreed that the ebook hadn't panned out quite as they had anticipated. And the line that someone used there, quoting someone else whom I can't remember, was that typically we tend to overestimate the possibilities in the short run and underestimate them in the long run. And that's probably right, that overall there's a big thing happening here, but be careful about leaping too much in the immediate.

**Smith:** One final question: This is a curiosity for me personally, and perhaps to others, and that is the proliferation of English language Bibles that target the evangelical community. Obviously it's healthy for the publishers, and it drives a lot of what you do as far as the diversity of titles that you're able to produce,

and we benefit from that as libraries. What goes through a publisher's mind in that regard? Is that a good situation for the English-speaking church, and how would you defend what your company has done in that regard?

**Hillman:** Since we don't publish Bibles, I can speak very quickly to that. The English Bible is the most published and the least read book in the world.

**Hunt:** Our Bible division has reflected greatly upon what's happening with that very issue, and their concern, and their sort of business motto is a desire to have more people engaging the Bible more. It's not about the number of units that you sell; it's how do we get people to roll up their sleeves and spend time in the Word, and let the Word of God impact them. And, you know, it's not easy when we live in an age that becomes increasingly entertainment-oriented, which I think is a challenge for us on all serious publishing, not just within the Bible. We're trying to connect in fresh ways. I think the most obvious example of that right now is an audio product called *The Bible Experience*, which has been very moving to us to see the consumer response to encountering God in a fresh way.

**Kinney:** We do not publish Bibles, and I do understand the practical value for a publisher to have a Bible, their own translation that they can produce other things building off of that translation. But just as an individual, I think something has been lost. Just a quick story: I think I was reading a Steinbeck novel at one point, and he drew a colorful picture of this person who came in and wanted to grab a little wine, and then it said "for his stomach's sake." And I thought, if you know the old King James Bible, you know the allusion there, and if you don't, you missed it completely. I feel like in our current culture, there's not the one translation, apart from perhaps the NIV [New International Version], that has that sort of cultural connectedness that at one point the King James Bible had.

**Pott:** Well, we don't publish Bibles either. Of course, what we can hope for is that all these new Bibles lead people to the 9-volume "Kittel" [i.e., the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel and published by Eerdmans].

**Smith:** That's a great note. †