

THE “WEAKEST FEATURE” IN OUR WORK

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“The lack of high quality indigenous Christian literature is one of the weakest features of the modern Protestant missionary endeavor,” says Jack Graves of the Overseas Council on Theological Education. “David Barrett has reported at least 700 global plans to evangelize the world. We do not know of a single plan to begin providing basic theological text and reference books in the 43 educational languages around the globe (serving 85 per cent of the world’s population)...A cooperative effort could address this critical educational need.”

But translations will not be enough. Wherever there are Christian believers, there are kingdom stories that vibrate to be written. There are mature people with God-given wisdom. And there is a famine for hearing the words of God in context.

One country may boast graduate seminaries and pastors who read Greek. Another may pulsate with a young church and unschooled leaders. In both cases, the Holy Spirit can empower people to apply the whole counsel of God to their time and place. Imported, translated books cannot do that well. Trained local writers can. They will help us avoid “...the homogenizing pressures of globalization, where the gospel is treated like a hamburger—exactly the same size, shape, and smell everywhere in the world,” in the words of Filipina Melba Maggay.

PUBLISHING FOR THE CHRISTIAN MIND

We need local books. We also need balanced content. When publishers ask merely, “What will sell?” we end up with duplicate materials on current hot topics, while other equally important topics are overlooked..

Good writing must be proactive, not reactive. It must ask not only “What are the answers?” but also “What are the questions?” It cannot merely respond to what people demand, but must probe whether those are the truly significant issues.

This is done best in community. To select a topic ought not to be merely the whim of an individual, or the marketing decision of a publisher, but the prayerful choice of a body of people who live in that context and care for it.

Lanka Bible College in Sri Lanka is not a wealthy school. Yet for 25 years they have stimulated the publication of original books both in Tamil and in Sinhalese languages. The faculty regularly discusses what the Church and the world need. After they have chosen a topic, they select a writer, who may or may not be on the faculty. They challenge the chosen writer to accept the task. They provide continuing encouragement. For short writing stints, pastors and alumni can use the library and stay free of charge in the dorms. Graduating seniors with promise receive a personal exhortation to write from the President. This faculty has

determined that their people will have a better understanding of the great themes of the faith each year because of the books that are being sent to press now.

“All our preaching, week in and week out, should gradually unfold the ‘whole counsel of God,’ and so contribute to the development of Christian minds in the congregation,” says John Stott. Shouldn’t our publishing, year in and year out, develop Christian minds in our people across the land?

In every country, a prayerful group can set five and ten year publishing goals. The more comprehensive the group, the better.

GOOD NEWS FOR THE SECULAR WORLD

God’s truth is also for the world. Thoughtful nonbelievers read books like *Senhor, Sara a Nossa Terra* (Lord, Save Our Land) by Brazilian Paulo Proscurschim. This book tackles tough issues that affect citizens in general. Here the Christian worldview is shown to be reasonable and relevant—indeed, it may be the salt that flavors the national stew.

In India, Christian freelancer Pamela Ninan writes about social issues for secular periodicals. Christian programs for prisoners, prostitutes, alcoholics, and the poor are newsworthy. As a writer gives reasons for such a program, theological themes unroll naturally.

From art to microloans, from ecology to ethnicity, from sports to science, Christians can speak to the general reader. Consider Christmas and Easter articles. Malaysian Bob Teoh published a Christmas piece in the Singapore New Straits Times in December 2003. With direct quotes from Luke and Isaiah, the article is biblical, tactful, richly contextual, and spiced with humor.

Or consider local biographies and church histories. Without these, the next generation will be poorer. In Nepal, Solon Karthak has published *Three Pearls of the Creator*, the biographies of three early Nepali Christians. In Myanmar, Grace Hla has published *Prayer Arrows and Love Bullets*, the story of an indigenous mission movement that sent 300 young adults across borders for three years in the 1970s. In Malaysia, Hilmy Nor has published *Circumcised Heart*, the account of his fourteen months in prison as a Malay follower of Jesus.

If we are going to help brothers and sisters grow to maturity in Christ, and if we are going to share the good news in the secular arena in ways that are winsome, articulate, and compelling, so that it is indeed good news, we will need good publications.

Excellent evangelical agencies that offer international training for writers and publishers include Media Associates International, Magazine Training Institutes, Cook Communications Ministries International, and, for Latinos, Letra Viva network.

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