

# KEEP THE LIGHT BURNING

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**W**hen did Ceprodlilic's publishing ministry in Burundi begin?

In 1989, I was holding a seminar and encouraged my listeners to read more books. They all asked me the same question—"What can we read?" They said, "We do not have any books in Kirundi," our national language. It was then that I started writing, translating, and publishing books. We have since produced more than 30 titles.

So, you were publishing when the war began...

My country has been at war for 10 years now, but when the war started, it was a great shock to us. It took us some time to understand and accept that our country was at war. We realized we had to continue our ministry and publish books.

Why did you continue once the war started?

In this period of violence, [where some estimate that over 200,000 Burundians have died], our people need Christian books more than ever before. They long to know the truth. Politicians popularize their ideologies. In times of crises and violence, people follow the most eloquent leaders, but that is when it is imperative that Christian writers show up. It is not a matter of eloquence, but of duty.

Go on...

Christians have no right to shirk their duties during difficult times. We are the voice of the voiceless. We keep God's revealed Word alive. We remind people that God is God, even through war.

The continuation of Christian publications in a period of crisis and confusion becomes a great opportunity to witness to people. It shows stability, a quality that is so often missing in times of conflict and tension. Our faith in God does not change. We live a dynamic and confident life in Him—a life that can stand the turmoil of war to shine, to give light to Burundi.

Christian publishers give people a chance to make a choice. They can choose the way of violence, or

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the way of truth, though this last choice is costly.

It can be very costly for Christian publishers. It is not easy.

Yes, we go through many hardships in our work. Most of my own people see that violence is the only alternative, but the only safe way

out is forgiveness. We have to challenge our readers to forgive, no matter what it takes. Yes, some of our writings do not make us popular, but at least people get to know what is required and recommended for a Christian life.

How do you prepare for violence that may be directed against your ministry?

We pray for God's protection over Ceprodlilic. We are determined to serve God in season and out of season. It is also important to remember we can lose things, such as books, but we must not lose our vision as long as we live.

How do you keep going?

It is crucial for the leader to strengthen the unity of the staff. One of the publisher's most important tasks is to keep staff enthusiastic. Keep sharing the

vision and the projects to be achieved. Make this a regular activity. Challenge your staff even in times of trouble.

You know, we cannot simply sit and wait for the war to end. History tells us countries often struggle through wars for many years. People survive by continuing to run

their businesses, and this applies to our small publishing house too.

But if the infrastructure is demolished and destroyed...

Be prepared for anything. If our books are stolen, we believe that those who will read them may be helped. If our building is demolished, we remember that we are in a troubled country, and that helps us to continue.

It is essential to focus on what we are going to do, instead of concentrating on the fact that we may lose books, equipment, or even a bookstore. Setting priorities is a must for survival.

To keep your focus, you draw strength and inspiration from Scripture.

The Bible lists many examples of people who dedicated themselves to God's work no matter what they faced. We hope we are contributing to solving the problems of the Burundi people when we publish Christian books. The fact that we continue to work in itself helps people to see that normal life is possible. It is sad that some Christian ministries close due to worries for their own safety. A Christian writer should not be the first to flee.

Jesus Christ made the greatest statement ever made by someone who was facing danger. He said: "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the body is weak." (Matt. 26:41)

Besides, Paul declared that he was ready not only to suffer for God's cause, but even to die for it. Everyone serving God in a risky situation has this challenge. It is a commitment no one can bypass.

What practical steps do you take to be prepared for violence and loss?

A Christian publisher has to think realistically. We are living in a country which is going through a civil war. This reality helps us to



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not behave as if the country is peaceful. It leads to adapting our strategies to that situation.

Be ready to move from place to place when necessary. Keep your vision. Be a mediator. The great temptation in violent contexts is choosing sides. Avoid divisive statements against the warring factions. Make it plain that you stand for the truth and that truth seeks peace for everyone. Encourage people not to lose hope.

What can you share with Christian publishers in other troubled countries?

My advice for others who are working and publishing in volatile environments is to take heart and continue the work. It is precisely in difficult times that Christians need words of comfort and that non-Christians need words of hope. As Christian publishers, we have a God-given responsibility to speak for the weak and to give them a word of inspiration.

Are people receptive to your books when they have so much to worry about during times of war?

It might be surprising, but even in times of war people have time to read. Some are displaced refugees.

They do not have many activities to keep them busy. Instead of just sitting there, they read. Our books help them to accept the realities of life, to understand that a house may be destroyed, but that is not the end. After bad times, good times come. We encourage readers to remember that God has good plans for them.

What about the times when your message is rejected?

Sometimes our rights are denied, but we must continue to serve God and believe better times will come. Anyone who stands firm in a time of ethnic violence, who is not biased, will always be accused of betrayal. Most of the time, Christians are suspect because they are not involved in violence. Through our literature, we encourage Christians to be prepared for rejection, even from their own people.

Do you have a final word for our readers?

The most important point to remember is that even those who are violent need a word of hope. That is why we keep publishing. We know what we are doing is needed, and that it is risky. We choose to do God's will regardless of the consequences. We keep the light on, keep it burning even for those who are violent. We are convinced they lack something God has for them: peace in their lives.❖