



Pacifist Publisher Combats Evil

Henry Góngora (clara@neutel.net.co), of Ediciones CLARA, a Mennonite publishing house in Bogotá, Colombia, talks about his commitment to promoting justice and peace.

The perennial violence in Colombia that kills thousands every year gives Ediciones CLARA publisher Henry Góngora a lot to think about.

"I cannot accept the stigma that Colombians are genetically predisposed to violence," he says. To prove it, the Mennonite publisher is determined to fight evil with good.

"After the Lord mercifully made a difference for me by saving me, with just six minutes to spare, from one of the latest tragedies that have sent our country into mourning, I renewed my commitment to be a hope builder, a repairer of broken walls, a lover of life."

In February, Góngora barely escaped an explosion that killed 40 people and injured 170. Just a few weeks earlier, a houseful of explosives killed 12 people and hurt 100 others, scattering debris all over the area. Bogotá is not a safe place.

Despite the civil war that has ravaged the country, Góngora maintains a positive image of Colombia. "We live in a beautiful country, blessed with natural resources and a vibrant people," he says. "Colombia is a country with divine promises of restoration and peace."

However, Góngora does not deny that his country faces many challenges. "Yes, the social and humanitarian crisis of our nation is lamentable," he observes. "About 12 million Colombians, or 60 percent of the population, live below the poverty line. The middle class is increasingly decimated. We have a government driven by a profound desire for vengeance."

What is the role of a Christian publisher in this environment? What message should writers, editors, and publishers bring to people living in conditions of crisis, violence, and death? How can they help Christians renew their strength?

"The only way is feeding them with hope, turning their eyes to the Sustainer of life," says Góngora. "Christians here must clothe themselves," he exhorts, "with compassion, humility, kindness, gentleness and patience, rather than with cruelty, pride, abusiveness and impatience."

Góngora acknowledges that bringing a message of hope and peace demands hard work. "We must not stop working, until the last drop of sweat," he says.

"We must commit ourselves and

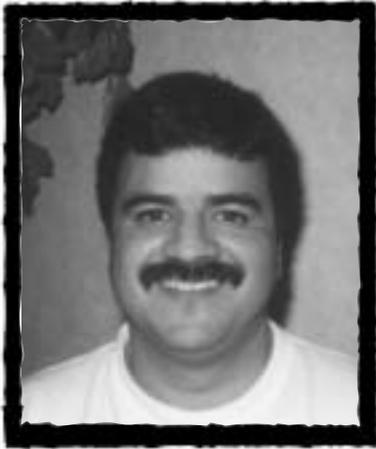
not be indifferent—because then we would be partakers in the evil," adds Góngora. "Those who traffic in evil should not intimidate us, those who feed death must not have the last word in life."

Christian publishers must help their readers understand that even in crisis, God is still present and active. "The Lord does not leave us desperate," he says. "If we follow Him, Jesus will lead us to the path of peace."

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Scripture says, "Ask the LORD for rain in the springtime; it is the LORD who makes the storm clouds. He gives showers of rain... and plants of the field to everyone" (Zech. 10:1). "We must grab hold of this important truth," says Góngora. "We must ask the Lord to send us showers of blessings."

What are these showers that Góngora desires? "Showers of his Spirit, to bring repentance, renewal of our minds and the breaking of



"We must never stop working," says Henry Góngora, director of Ediciones CLARA in Bogotá, Colombia, "to bring readers a message of hope and peace."

selfishness." As Christians receive the showers of the Holy Spirit, they will better fulfill their prophetic responsibilities, denounce injustice and proclaim the gospel. "They will be peacemakers and hope builders."

One hidden blessing of the political and economic crisis is that Christian publishers are learning to work together. In Bogotá, representatives of Christian publishing houses and printing companies meet monthly to pray for one another, share burdens and develop joint action plans.

"We must concentrate on local production," says Góngora. "In an economy in crisis, most publishers cannot afford to acquire external loans and debts."

Devaluation of the Colombian peso, relative to the dollar, stands at 35 percent per year, while inflation is at 6.5 percent.

"Obviously, Colombia's inflation is artificial, but does limit the rise of internal prices and makes imports unmanageable," says Góngora. "That is one reason why Christian publishers are meeting to share strategies, product ideas, and marketing solutions."

Working in unity would increase the impact of Christian publishing on Colombian society.

"Our government can be brought to God's way—the military, the guerrillas, the paramilitary forces, the criminals, can put away

their arms," he says. "The rich and powerful can be converted from their selfishness," he hopes. "These are the kinds of people our publications must reach. These are the people we must think about when we publish our books."

This publisher sees hope despite the endless carnage Colombia has experienced for decades.

"Healing for our nation is not far away," he ventures. Góngora quotes the prophet Isaiah, who said "Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear" (Isa. 58:8).

Góngora affirms "Colombia can be rebuilt." He claims the prophet's

promises: "Your people will rebuild... you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings" (Isa. 58:11-12).

Góngora has a dream for his country and is determined to work toward it. "I dream of the country God promised—a country of peace and justice for all, of abundant grain and wine—a country where our sons and daughters will grow up beautiful and strong." ❖

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Called to Publish in VIOLENT PAKISTAN

In this predominantly Muslim country, Boaz Gill, of Shaffaf Christian Communications (www.shaffaf.org), finds ways to contribute to society despite threats from extremists.

International media continue to broadcast a flurry of reports of anti-Christian violence in Pakistan. Grenade attacks on churches. Anti-Christian religious figures calling for attacks on churches and organizations. Police exchanging gun fire with religious radicals. Arrests of people plotting further violence.

These reports make it clear that Christianity—let alone Christian publishing—is not welcome by some in this country. Christian publishing in Pakistan is dangerous business. Take the experience of Boaz Gill of Shaffaf Christian Communications, publisher of *Rahbar* (Urdu for “Guide”), one of the few Christian magazines in the country. Not too long ago, he stepped into the Shaffaf offices, located on the second floor of his residence, to look at incoming mail. He noticed a

letter from Gujrat City (a community some 250 kilometers away from Islamabad).

Gill was in for a surprise. The letter was a threat. “We were warned not to publish Christian materials in Pakistan because it is a Muslim country,” he reports. “The unnamed writer threatened us with severe consequences if we did not stop publishing Christian materials. He also advised us to read Islamic literature.”

While *Rahbar* is the flagship of the organization, Shaffaf is involved in other activities “for the advancement of the Christian faith by all means of communication.” This includes producing audio and video resources and books, coordinating seminars and conferences, and implementing various initiatives to “minimize religious prejudice” and “promote harmony.”



“God wants us in Pakistan,” says Boaz Gill, Shaffaf’s director, “and He will help us.”

Gill is particularly passionate about his organization’s efforts to build bridges between the Muslim majority and the Christian minority. “Throughout Pakistan’s history, we see hatred, prejudice, enmity, discrimination, and persecution against the Christian community,” he acknowledges.

The events of September 11, 2001 added fuel to the fire. Hatred for Christians became “crystal clear.” Pakistan’s support for U.S.-led action against the Taliban, in Afghanistan, triggered increased violence against Christians.

“One mullah [Muslim cleric] said two Christians would be killed



Gill participated in a gathering of prayer and fasting for Pakistan held last year in front of the Punjab Provincial Assembly Hall.