



*Writers, editors and publishers in Christian media must have a plan for dealing with violence.*

*by Kim Pettit*

# Editors, Police Violence

**C**hristian publishing. Violence. These words do not belong together. Or, if they do, we take for granted that Christian publishers provide an alternative to the violence found in secular media. Christian media only comforts victims and reaches out to perpetrators. It is exempt from the sins ascribed to others.

Yet the Bible, the Book that informs the work of Christian writers and publishers, can be seen as a violent book. Genesis alone portrays fratricide (chapter 4), war (14), holocaust (19), rape (34), and slavery (37). The Psalms repeatedly call for vengeance. Revelation drips of blood. The cornerstone of the Bible is the brutal crucifixion of Jesus. The life-giving Bible does not gloss over the horrors of sin.

Author J. Denny Weaver highlights this tension. He points out that some see Christian history as being violent. “Look at the crusades, multiple blessings of wars, warrior popes, support for capital and corporal punishment, ...justifications of slavery, ...colonialism in the name of conversion to Christianity, ... systemic violence [against] women [and children].”

On the other hand, he says, “Look [at] the persistent tradition of Christian pacifism, the prohibition of fighting by clergy, the just war doctrine that declares war as sin even when deemed a necessary evil, [and look] at Jesus, the Prince of Peace; whose Sermon on the Mount taught nonviolence and love [for one’s] enemies; who faced his accusers nonviolently and then died [without resistance].”

Just how does your publishing house handle the tension? In other words, do you have an established policy on the violence editors will allow in Christian publications?

“In treating stories from the Bible that deal with battles or other scenes of violence,” says Cook’s policy, “we avoid overemphasizing concrete details that play up violent action. [Only] details that are necessary to bring out the historical meaning of the events may be given.”

Cook’s policy also states, “War stories that show courage and heroism but do not glorify war are acceptable. Incidents in war that stress helping others, being loyal to comrades, and making personal sacrifices may be used.” But, there are limits. “We do not glorify war heroes or play up the death and destruction of war.”

The same applies to depictions of sinful behavior. While sinners themselves may demonstrate loyalty, courage, and other admirable qualities, Cook’s materials will not glorify sin or encourage readers to view sinful actions in a positive light.

Fiction is another area where violence and Christian publishing intersect. At Cook authors and editors are permitted to tell stories involving criminals, spies, pirates, etc., “so long as the characters involved in any shady activities are portrayed as not admirable.” The policy makes it clear that “such characters should never be glorified; neither should the stories themselves imply an approval of violence as a way of life or a way of solving problems.”

Developing a policy for news is more challenging. In *InterLit*, we sometimes report on violence suffered by Christians. How detailed should the descriptions of persecution be? Understating the suffering could fail to communicate its import to the readers, yet providing gruesome details can traumatize them. One article included a photo of the damage caused by a bomb planted at a Christian book stand in a Muslim country. The incident hurt 25 people. Some photos showed the blood. If one had, for instance, shown a severed hand—we would not have printed it.

The fact is, “Christian publishing” and “violence” do not exist in separate realms. Publishers need policies on how to depict violence. What is acceptable? What is permissible? To what end? We publish in and for a violent world. Get ready for it. ❖