



Evangelism and Discipleship Through Literature in the Ivory Coast

By Stella Okoronkwo

Stella Okoronkwo is a missionary, author, and publisher. Some of her works have been published with Uzima Press in Nairobi, Kenya; others she has published herself. HappyGate Books is Okoronkwo's own company and distributes her books in English and French. For more information, write to optimalsprings@yahoo.com.

The Lord gave me a divine appointment in Ivory Coast in 1980.

At the time, I was a student of Modern European languages at the University of Ife, Nigeria. Though students were usually sent to France or Senegal, the Lord arranged for my class of 39 students to go to Ivory Coast instead.

We were four evangelical Christians in the class and we quickly found a local church to attend and a campus Bible study group. I knew I was on a prophetic journey, though all was not clear to me at the time.

The call

A famous song that I used to sing in the early years of my Christian life says, "God does not compel us to go but makes us willing to go." [God poured a deep love and compassion into my heart](#) for the land and [for the Ivorians](#). This love extended to all people who spoke French. The Lord began to show me the spiritual atmosphere, which was heavy with mysticism and witchcraft. Upon His leading I began weekly fasts and prayers for the land. I began evangelizing

but could not find enough literature. What I found was like a drop in the ocean.

I was a student with few resources, but spent my pocket money on buying tracts. I dared not let my parents know about this! I wanted to invest in the Kingdom.

One day, inside *La Maison de la Bible*, a Bible bookstore in Abidjan, I made a covenant with God like Jacob did while he was with Laban, his uncle ([Genesis 28:20-22](#)). "God, if you help me and I finish my studies, I will write tracts and books for your work, not only in the Anglophone world but particularly in the Francophone world." Little did I know that God does not joke with such prayers.

Three weeks before the end of my exchange program, I heard an amazing testimony of God's divine protection over my life. Some non-Christian students said [they](#) tried many times to hypnotize me with witchcraft. Each time, they found a furnace of fire in my room. They wondered what kind of witchcraft acted like that. When I told them it was God's power through Jesus Christ, they did not believe it.

I was astonished. I said to the Lord, "Bring me back to this nation to complete the work I started for your glory. Amen!"

Upon returning home, I got married the following year and three kids followed. My husband and I served in Kenya for 14 years as missionaries. I despaired and lost sight of the burden God had given me as a student in

Abidjan. Then, God acted at the appointed time to transfer our family to Ivory Coast.

The country was experiencing huge political and spiritual problems. I was welcomed by a *coup d'état* in December 1999, three weeks after my arrival, and a civil war since 2002. Animism and illiteracy reigned. Many in this nation attend church without a genuine conversion or deliverance. What little they learn in church they then mix with traditional beliefs, giving rise to syncretism. Classes for new Christians were not common. Few have personal Bibles. Many in the church I attended got baptized without understanding why. I saw a need to teach and deepen their roots in the Word.

Addressing Biblical illiteracy

By 2000, I began teaching new Christians and discipleship classes in a local church. Materials were not available. I had to borrow a lot from *Growing in Christ When Young*, a youth curriculum I self-published in Kenya in 1998. My curriculum training with Cook Communication Ministries in 1993 assisted me in shaping this curriculum. Now on a different mission field, I had to adapt my prior work for adults, and rewrite it in French. Thus my book, *La Croissance Spirituelle (Spiritual Growth)*, was born. I published it 2002.

The classes grew both in number and in strength. Some people purchased many books and offered them to others as gifts. They wanted their friends to be blessed, as they were. Though I do not attend this church today, the Bible classes have continued and Christian leaders have emerged from them.

Lessons learned

I looked for literature and there was nothing suitable for my work in Ivory Coast. If you are a missionary in the same situation, here are some lessons I learned as I began publishing for evangelism and discipleship.

- 1. Test the waters first.** In every new mission field, do informal research. Observe those you want to reach and determine what are their most pressing spiritual needs. Be sensitive to the needs of the people and to the move of the Holy Spirit. If the people cannot read and write, the first step is to organize literacy classes.
- 2. Seek input from capable nationals.** Because my material was refined in class, I was able to develop locally appropriate materials. Foreign materials should not be thrown on the people but adapted to their culture and level.
- 3. Broaden your outlook.** Prepare the materials in such a way that they can be used beyond your local church, ministry, or even country. This may mean avoiding some doctrinal issues, not putting dates, and avoiding local jargon and expressions.
- 4. Look for publishing partners.** Self-publishing is no easy task. It is a big risk. Once an author has established a deep need and has developed materials to meet the need, a publisher's support is needed to make things happen. Publishers are established by God, and so are authors. They need to work hand in hand—even if it means funding the project together.
- 5. Persevere in your calling.** Authors need encouragement from publishers otherwise it is very easy for them to throw in the towel. I did it at one point, due to discouragement. But God prodded me gently to go on. He said to me, "Do your part and I will do mine. I will bring people your way to support you." I simply obeyed.

2007 Cook Communications Ministries International - www.ccmi.org, First Published, January, 2007.

ChristianTrade Association International

PO Box 62187 • Colorado Springs, CO 80962-2187 USA

TEL +1 719 432 8428 • FAX +1 719 325 7001 • info@ChristianTrade.com • www.ChristianTrade.com