



## Human Wisdom or God's Wisdom?

By David Mehlis

*Seek a balance between martyrdom or market savvy.*

Pope Benedict XVI was recently criticized for a speech in which he confronted Muslims for their use of violence. What was lost, in the ensuing controversy, was that his speech was actually devoted to the divorce in Western Europe of reason—that is, philosophy and science—from faith. It is to this divorce that he attributes the curse of secularization of European society. I have become increasingly aware that this secularization is not taken for granted elsewhere in the world.

In the early years of my ministry, I was focused on the work of the church in the West with only occasional consideration of God's work in the church worldwide. I have been fortunate in recent years to spend time with brothers and sisters who are not part of a postmodern culture. These Christians not only have faith "in" God but have faith that God is "sufficient in all things."

We, as Christian publishers are part of our respective worlds, and sometimes it is difficult for us to gain a perspective that is broader than our cultures. Personally, I have noticed a stark contrast between the growing church in the Two-Thirds World and my own world. While difficulties in the Two-Thirds World are incomprehensible, faith is pervasive in every step of living in countries such as China, Brazil and Nigeria. While in the West, faith "in" God is central, faith that God is "all sufficient" stands in contrast to human reason and wisdom. In the West the church thinks it will prosper by applying its best skill sets—eloquence, sophistication, knowledge, and especially the ability to market God to a postmodern, secular society. We forget that God may be limited by our human skills and success. In the Two-Thirds World, in contrast, the impossible is possible because God

empowers those who are weak (see 1 Cor. 1:18-31).

As publishers, whom will we emulate—the martyrs or the rationalists? What is the balance? Obviously the martyrs, even in the 20th century, did not seek martyrdom. When must we proclaim hard truths, and when must we respond to the marketplace? At the core, are we Christian publishers to use our best human skills to make God more palatable to our culture? Or are we messengers who testify to God's power in our world?

In the last 25 years, some Christian publishers in the U.S. seemed to have tilted toward reason and human ability to market the Gospel—and not without success. Having seen God's hand at work in countries such as China, Vietnam and Brazil, I believe we as publishers might consider carefully Pope Benedict's observations of the impact of human reason at work in the Church and not just on the Church. Pope Benedict clearly believes the decline of Christendom in Europe resulted from the supremacy of reason over faith.

Economists constantly declare this is the Asian century. As Christians we might do well to consider the fate of Europe—once the heart of the Reformation. Some region or nation of the Two-Thirds World will, in all

likelihood, become the spiritual leader of Christendom in the coming century. But as this transition takes place, will we as Christian publishers be proclaimers of the Gospel, or will we mimic human wisdom?

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**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](mailto:info@ChristianTrade.com) • [www.ChristianTrade.com](http://www.ChristianTrade.com)