

Gracious Surprise FOR Reformed Publisher

R. Wayne Andersen, missionary publisher in Mexico City, Mexico, talked with InterLit editor Kim Pettit in Buenos Aires, Argentina, about Faro de Gracia's strategies to disseminate Puritan and Reformed literature to Spanish-speakers in the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

Tell us about your publishing ministry. How did Publicaciones Faro de Gracia begin?

The ministry is nine years old, but only incorporated as a publishing house three years ago. Faro de Gracia is a non-profit organization and sells its books near cost. We have six people on staff, including myself. Almost all of them donate at least part of their tithe to help the ministry.

Our vision is to introduce Christians to Reformed doctrine. We want them to understand that, historically, the Reformed view was the Biblical, orthodox, sound doctrine, even when you go back to the time of the church fathers. Augustine is a prime example of this. Many of the Reformers came to sound doctrine through reading Augustine. Christians need to be reintroduced to the literature that came out of the Reformation. It is such a valuable heritage.

What kind of books does Faro de Gracia publish?

Most are abridged works of the Puritans. The Puritan style of writing is laborious and their works can be difficult to understand, even in English. Grace Baptist Publications, in England, abbreviated and abridged the original works. Faro de Gracia simply secured the transla-

tion rights and published their books in Spanish.

Did you do any market research?

Not really. In the first six years, the books we published were not designed for sale but were for our friends and for churches that knew me. As others heard about our books, they wanted them too. From the very first year, we began to ship the books I was printing in my basement all over Latin America.

Our vision expanded when we saw the great need for literature in Spanish, particularly when we began to receive requests for books from a lot of different countries—Peru, Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. Every time we released a new title, we had to reprint it the following year. Volume sales were there right from the start. We send out thousands of books a year.

Thousands of books a year? How many titles do you have?

We have 17 titles, and six more in production. We began printing two books per year. After six years I had 12 titles, with a minimum print run of 3,000 copies each per year.

What about funding?

Naturally, as we publish more than two or three books per year,

we need more money. Faro de Gracia is self-supporting in the sense that all income received from book sales goes right back into printing new books and titles. New funds are needed to finance the initial print runs of new titles. I am in constant communication with churches, foundations, and trust funds to see if there is an interest in financing some of our titles.

Are all your books translations?

Yes, except for one written by a local author. In 2000 we published a Reformed hymnal. That was a tremendous project, the combined effort of close to ten churches. They suggested hymn titles and helped with proofreading, typing, and translation. The project gave me a tremendous sense of accomplishment when it finally came out. There are some typos still in it [laughter], but overall it is a nice top quality hard-back hymnal. We set a presale price of US\$4.50 per hymnal, and sold 2,500, of the first 5,000 printed, right away. That is how we financed the printing.

So, you sold 2,500 before it came off the press. Is that how you usually sell your books?

No. We try to get presales, of course, but presales do not really cover the cost of printing, because



R. Wayne Anderson, Faro de Gracia's founder, is "pleasantly surprised" by the response to Puritan and Reformed literature in Latin America.

Faro de Gracia's books are sold at or near cost. We receive donations, also, and other forms of support. The team of six people I mentioned earlier does not include the three teams of translators that are also volunteering their time. The translators are very excited about Faro de Gracia's vision.

The response you have been getting has been tremendous. For someone who just started, to sell 3,000 copies per title every year is just unheard of in Latin America.

Yes, it has been very unusual. Frankly, it surprised us.

What accounts for your success? What can other publishers learn from your experience?

Communication is key. Faro de Gracia's books have sold primarily through word of mouth. We have centered primarily on churches. We have used e-mail ever since we began. I still have the same e-mail address that I had 10 years ago.

What kind of communications do you have with your customers?

Because we deal primarily with churches, I attend different conferences within the Reformed Baptist movement. From the outset Faro de Gracia has worked primarily with churches that bought books for their congregations or for their own book tables. I attend three conferences for pastors every year. I make it a point to tell the pastors what Faro de Gracia's new titles are and what we have planned. I also meet with them individually to bring their accounts up to date.

Have you reached out to pastors in other denominations?

Yes, in Mexico. We rely on word of mouth advertising, but I am also going to more conferences to promote our literature. This year Faro de Gracia will promote its books in *Apuntes Pastorales*, a magazine for Latin American pastors that has very good distribution. Also, through contacts at the CBA convention in Atlanta, I was able to secure a contract with Riverside Distributors to present our books to Christian bookstores across the U.S. who sell Spanish-language books.

What would you say to foreign publishers wanting to work with a U.S. distributor?

Begin by laying the groundwork. First, obtain International Standard Book Numbers (ISBNs) for all your books. An ISBN and a bar code on each book are a necessity. No U.S. distributor will consider your books unless you have these. Second, distributors are looking for a quality product. Third, they are concerned as to whether they will receive the books in a timely fashion. We have a warehouse in the U.S. From there we can ship books to any country in the world with some degree of certainty that they will arrive in good condition. Fourth, make sure your publishing company can work in dollars. We established a U.S. account for Faro de Gracia so there

would be no problems with currency exchanges. We incorporated in the U.S. rather than in Mexico. In the U.S. it is easier to incorporate as a non-profit, tax-exempt organization than it is in Mexico.

Since Faro de Gracia's books are sold almost at cost, how can you work with U.S. distributors who require at least a 50 percent discount off the retail price?

The price structures for our distributors are very different for their exclusive markets. We work with Riverside exclusively for the continental United States. For Puerto Rico and the rest of Latin America, we use a different distributor. We also work with a distributor in Spain.

If Faro de Gracia has a Web site, how do you price your product on the site?

We just completed our Web page, www.farodegracia.org. There are some things we will have to work through to deal with orders coming to us through this channel.

What challenges does Faro de Gracia face?

Right now, the only limitation for Faro de Gracia is funding. We have secured a good-sized credit line with a bank, but as we expand even that credit line will probably not be sufficient for our needs. We are reprinting 3,000 copies each of the twelve titles we printed last year. And, the only reason we are printing 3,000 copies is because that is all our funds allow, or I would have printed 5,000.

What obstacles do publishers in Latin America face?

There are three obstacles for any Christian publisher that publishes Spanish literature. The first is a simple lack of readership. People do not have an interest in reading. In the Hispanic world, even periodicals and daily newspapers struggle to survive. There are few bookstores

or libraries. People do not have an interest in reading, they do not see its value or importance. That is the first obstacle.

The second issue is finances. Publishers must provide books at an affordable and reasonable price.

The third obstacle is that many people in the Latin market have a low level of education, usually not much above a sixth grade level. Books have to be in a format that is relatively simple, on a simple educational level.

How have you dealt with these obstacles?

What Faro de Gracia has done, right from the start, is to promote books through churches, to pastors who see the value in books and who encourage people in their congregations to read. There is real interest in evangelical churches. That addresses the first issue.

To address the second issue, money, when Faro de Gracia was incorporated it was as a non-profit organization. We approach book publishing as a ministry, not as a business, and provide books at the lowest price possible. Our books are of high quality, yet the average retail price is less than two dollars per book and is very competitive.

They must be small books...

Average length is about 90 pages. This is deliberate. Short books, simple formats that are easy to read and understand, are also easy to purchase. They are more accessible to the Spanish market, and this helps us overcome the third obstacle I mentioned.

Faro de Gracia's largest book is the hymnal, a thick book with over 500 hymns, but most of our titles are much shorter. The largest is 150-160 pages, and the smallest is 40-60 pages. Our books are printed very attractively, with full-color covers, perfect bound, with beautiful white paper rather than newsprint. We insist that our books be top quality. Even though they are sold at a retail price under two dollars, we want buyers to feel they are getting something of value.

When Faro de Gracia began, we decided we were going to be first-class. That is how Faro de Gracia has worked in every stage. We were not going to print our books in any way that would be less than high quality. To get a top-quality Web page, we waited until the Lord sent the right person to do the job.

We had some workers who could not fulfill our standards of quality and excellence. When they learned they could not fulfill their obligations they graciously backed out and then the Lord provided others to take their place.



Pictured above, Faro de Gracia's catalog and one of its first titles.

What can your readers expect in the months ahead?

We just released a book on the family and plan to publish three more on family relationships. Three other titles will be released in 2002. All our books are based on the Christian literature that transformed thousands of lives in the time of the Reformation. They are so applicable to our situation today, filled with such truth and life and power. Faro de Gracia wants to reintroduce the Church to Reformed literature, and that is exactly what we are doing. ♦

(continued from page 9) contrast to other price increases. Imported book prices have risen by 80 percent since January, and 95 percent of the books sold by Certeza and other Christian stores are imports. Many publishers and suppliers are working in dollars.

"Considering that Argentines continue to earn the same salary [as before the devaluation] in pesos," says Buono, "this is a difficult and painful reality for publishers." Still, Buono sees opportunities. "Now is the time to highlight Argentine books," she says. She is negotiating new distribution agreements with national publishers.

"As the government refuses to respond to importers' plight, our external debt (in U.S. dollars) has doubled," says Buono. Yet, thanks to the crisis, major U.S. book suppliers have offered more favorable terms to Argentine partners. "This is a wonderful time to look at alternatives," says Buono.

3. To maintain competitive advantages in a difficult market, Certeza is investing in its infrastructure. "We have been operating without the support of appropriate inventory and sales software," says Buono. "Now is a good time to explore and learn new software." Certeza is working on a stock control and accounting program with a local software developer that agreed to maintain pre-devaluation prices.

Certeza is also improving its retail outlets. "Our sales area is less cramped," says Buono. "We are creating a pleasant browsing environment." Customers read in comfortable chairs, listen to good music, and drink coffee in an air-conditioned environment.

"We have taken risks with fewer negative consequences," adds Adrian Intriery, manager of one of Certeza's shops. "Even today, despite the situation, we continue to plan the release of new books. God will grant the increase."

"It is a time of crisis," says Buono, "and a time of opportunity. God is granting great challenges, and we wait on the future with calm expectancy." ♦