



# Localized Publishing is the Future

*Indigenous publishers are in the best position to provide Christian answers to the concerns in their contexts.*

*by Isaac Phiri*

A cleric serving in Madras, India, was on television last night. He said that, in most cases, Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists accept and respect the Christian faith. However, some radicals within these faiths attempt to sideline Christianity as an imported religion. “They say our faith is foreign,” he said. “They forget that both Islam and Buddhism were ‘imported’ into India just like Christianity.”

What does this have to do with the future of Christian publishing? Everything. Our vision for the future hinges on the indigenization and localization of Christian communications. Christian publishing should not be seen as foreign intervention but as part and parcel of every culture.

There are many organizations that have for years gifted people around the world with literature. This is beneficial. I first fell in love with books at a library funded by British Aid. Later, some other organization distributed free New Testaments at my high school. As a university student, I helped distribute *Who is Jesus?*, a little book published by a local Bible society. However, deep within I had the nagging feeling that these resources were “imported” and that Christ was really an import—like a Japanese-made automobile. In fact, some non-Christian university students accused our student group of being CIA operatives because we distributed American-published books. Perhaps it was at that time that a desire for local expressions of the Christian faith was born in me.

The reflections on the future of Christian publishing captured in this issue of *InterLit* speak to this need. Christianity is growing worldwide. Globalization, or, as one contributor put it, McDonalidization, appears to have engulfed the world. At the same time, though, nationalism simmers. We may all like McDonalds, drive Japanese-made cars, be linked by the Internet and watch CNN, but it is clear we cannot “just

get along.” The events of and after September 11, 2001 are a bitter reminder of that.

Clearly, there are issues, concerns, and experiences that need to be addressed by Christians in each culture. For example, the director of a publishing venture in the Middle East, who attended one of our institutes, told us that Arab Christians struggle with the theological question: *Does God really give land to some ethnic groups?* Coming from a part of the world where divine claims to territory have never been an issue, I had never thought of that question. Some years ago I worked with a Canadian Christian who thought fighting for majority rule in Southern Africa was “terrorism.” I always thought it was a just struggle. Different experiences, different perspectives, different conclusions.

In some ways the world has become smaller, yet we all have unique experiences. We need publishing that understands these unique experiences and speaks to them accordingly. It must be publishing that is perceived and accepted as speaking from within the unique experiences.

This is not to say publishing that crosses cultures is obsolete. It is not. But while in the past the world was dominated by some cultures, in the future people with a multiplicity of cultural experiences will attempt to coexist in a global society. In this context, cross-cultural relationships will require authentic voices to communicate cultural perspectives. Indigenous publishers are the ones best positioned to find these voices, to disseminate their messages, and to foster understanding.

We need publishing that gives my Arab Christian friend—and others who live in areas at war over divine claims to territory—an opportunity to hear many voices attempt to address the question: *Does God give out land?* Many have died over this question. Localized publishing could save lives. ❖