



Losing, but Gaining

By Ishak Wonohadidjojo

Christian publishers have two primary objectives: spreading the Word and making a profit. A Christian publishing organization must aim towards eternity, spreading knowledge of the Living Word unto the ends of the earth. At the same time, it must develop a business plan that works, brings revenue to the company, and allows it to grow. Most of the time, these two objectives are seen to be contradictory. In my context, at least, people think that Christian organizations should not make money from their ministry, and that corporations should not pay attention to spreading the Word. The truth is that both objectives are not in contradiction. It is a paradox. The ideal situation is to balance these two goals in all programs developed by the publisher—but this is not possible in some cases. One of those cases is what we face in Indonesia.

Indonesia has the biggest Muslim population in the world. At least 85 percent of 230 million Indonesians are Muslim. The logical implications of this fact are the continual effort to change Indonesia into an Islamic country and a never-ending pressure toward Christian community. Evangelism and church planting are prohibited by the government. All ministries, including publishing, must be carefully carried out. Most of the time, Christian publishers must put a warning sign (“Exclusively for Our Own Community”) on all printed matter, so that Muslims will not read it. It reminds us of the “Smoking Can Cause Cancer & Impotence” sign on a cigarette box. In such

a context, Christian publishers can never consider the Muslim community as a target market.

One day, a woman using a jilbab (a Muslim head cover) stopped in front of a Christian bookstore’s booth in a national book fair. She picked up character-building curriculum for elementary school. Curious, I began a conversation with her. I learned that she was an elementary teacher in a public school. There was no Muslim curriculum on character building and she found “something good” in the material she browsed. She decided to buy the complete series—teacher’s editions and student books.

Closing our conversation, I asked her how she planned to use the books. I was stunned by her answer. She said she planned to copy the student books, distribute them to all students page by page as needed, and use them as teaching handouts. As she left, I calculated the loss to that particular Christian publisher. Suppose the teacher had 40 students in her class (the average in Indonesian public schools). She bought only one student book for a particular level, so the publisher lost 40 sales on that particular book. Also, the author will not receive the royalty from those 40 books. It is a violation of intellectual property law. I struggled with this.

Then, I remembered that it is impossible for a teacher like her to propose that her school order and buy those character-building books from a Christian publisher. It is also unlikely that the parents of her

students would accept that Christian books be used in their children's schooling. What I can imagine is the influence of the Biblical values integrated in those books on 40 Muslim students' life in a year. She found the Word inside the books was "something good." She teaches the Word without any doubt. She likely will use the same book for years. That's amazing!

Yes, the Christian publisher lost money! Yes, the author lost royalties! But the Word is spread to students we would never reach. This might be their only chance to be touched by the Living Word! Should we ask the teacher to keep the copyright, when it only matters because of money? In this case, we are losing money, but gaining lives.

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