



Love God's World

*Publishers
committed to
God's word
have a global
focus.*

by Isaac Phiri

The most commonly quoted Bible verse is John 3:16. It is so familiar we often miss its radical implications. In this verse, Jesus tells us that God loves the world. This must have surprised the Jewish followers of Christ. Their worldview was that God loved their ethnic group. Certainly not the Roman oppressors, the Greek revelers and the Ethiopian tourists.

I grew up in a British colony. I was told God loved Great Britain. When African leaders took over, I heard that God loves Africa. Now I live in North America. Nearly every Sunday, I hear that God loves the United States more than other countries. Once I was at a Korean missions conference. I heard about how much God loves that country and its people. The same claims are made by Chinese, Filipinos, Brazilians, etc.

Am I missing something? Does Jesus not make it clear that God loves the world? Does Paul not say there is now no Greek or Jew, male or female? If so, why this preoccupation with nationalities, ethnicity and race? When people suggest that God has a soft spot for some nations or people groups, are they not contradicting Jesus and Paul?

Christians are called to see the world as God sees it. God loves all people and wants all people to know his love. Christianity forces us out of our racial, ethnic, cultural and national boundaries and propels us into a new world where God's love is for all. New Testament authors celebrated this. God's power had liberated them from the confines of this sinful world.

Christian publishing, at its best, is about the dissemination of the message of Christ as stated in John 3:16. Christian publishers are called to broadcast God's love for *the world* to the world. This has radical implications for Christian publishing. It means Christian publishing goes against the grain. Society is exclusive (we Africans, Asians, Europeans, Latinos etc) and self-centered

(me). The Christian message is inclusive (*the world*) and selfless (*he gave*). Christian publishing breaks the boundaries, removes self and infuses God's global and selfless love.

Of course, this approach to Christian publishing is not easy. The easy way out is to conform to the world as it is—to publish what people want. People want to hear that God loves their country more than he does that of others, so books with that message are produced. People want to believe that God loves their race more than he does that of others, so books to that effect are published. People want to hear that God loves their gender, so that message is published. But to conform to these demands of fallen humanity is to betray the whole message of John 3:16.

How then shall we publish in a world that is "we" and "me" centered? How shall we publish for self-centered audiences that want only what appeals to their preferences, their cultures, their nationalities, their view of the world? How shall we reach readers who seem to reject anything from outside their boundaries?

There is no easy answer. But as people serving Christ in publishing, we should at least wrestle with these questions. How can we communicate a message that transcends human divisions?

In this issue of *InterLit*, publishers talk about the business of trying to get their books to cross borders and reach more people. Some succeed. Some fail. What is gratifying is that Christian publishers seek to reach the world. It is clear from John 3: 16 and from the Great Commission that Christian publishing should grow global. Here at Cook, we do this not only by developing products that can cross borders and cultures, but also by partnering with other publishers so that together we can proclaim the truth that God so loved *the world*. ❖