



NIGERIA

DAUNTING TASK for Christian Magazines

Lekan Otufondurin (lotufondurin@hotmail.com) and Sunday Oguntola of Journalists for Christ, Lagos, Nigeria, detail the challenges of Christian magazine publishers in their country.

For some time now, Nigerian Christians have witnessed an upsurge in the number of Christian magazines.

Just five years ago there were only three well-known Christian magazines in the country: *Challenge*, *Redemption Light*, and *Christian Mirror*, all published by large pentecostal churches. Today, there are no less than 20 such publications, and new Christian magazines are introduced to the market almost every week. Most of these are owned by private organizations, rather than churches.

Some of the new publications include *Lifeway Magazine*, *Living Force*, *Christian Benefits*, *Resource Magazine*, *Calvary New Magazine*, *Christian Digest*, *Kingdom Profile*, *Christian Growth Journal*, *Ministries Now* and *Pastor's Wife*.

Content

Christian readers, who in the past complained of being corrupted by secular magazines, have, for the most part, received

the new magazines with excitement. The editorial content of the publications is often helpful, bringing spiritual benefit. Most address issues relevant to the Christian community, individuals, and the nation at large.

A few publications are narrow in scope, like *Pastor's Wife* or *Church Growth Journal*. Most of the start-ups focus on general issues in Christianity. This leads to fierce competition for readers.

Many magazines, to survive, publish profiles of popular church leaders and their projects, yet this can bring criticism.

"The magazines focus on pentecostal churches," says Tosin Awolalu, communications director of West Africa Theological Seminary in Lagos, Nigeria. "They do not report what happens in other churches. This affects their reach."

Pentecostal and charismatic Christian churches are multiplying, yet other denominations in Nigeria have significant populations. For example, in

Nigeria "there are seven times as many Anglicans as there are Episcopalians in the entire United States," according to an April 15, 2001 *Newsweek* article.

Some publishers are trying to offer non-denominational coverage, but most battle with problems of acceptance across denominations and low patronage from Christians.

The general reading public is often suspicious of the new publications as well, because they do not expect them to meet the high standard set by secular magazines.

Most new Christian magazines are full-color, ostensibly to catch up with printing standards in the country. Except in a few cases, their design meets secular standards, but there are still many typographical errors in some publications.

Circulation

The greatest problem confronting Christian publications is how to circulate widely enough

to cover readers spread across the country. Most magazines hardly go beyond Lagos, a city of approximately 8 million people and Nigeria's commercial nerve center.

The majority of the Christian churches in the country are concentrated in Lagos. Because most publishers cannot afford the high transport costs of getting their titles to the nooks and crannies of the country, the Christians outside Lagos, in Nigeria's other 35 states, are at a disadvantage.

Christian magazines are not sold through secular distributors, as the production figures and commission are not attractive to vendors. Print runs for most Christian magazines rarely reach 5,000 copies, yet secular magazines print 30,000 copies or more per issue.

Christian publishers are also not ready to go through the ordeal of waiting endlessly for their money from vendors who are notorious for holding on to sales returns.

The magazines are sold in Christian and secular bookshops—and in churches, when the focus is on church leaders. CBA Nigeria has 89 retailer, 41 supplier, and 16 distributor members, so there is certainly a lively market for Christian periodicals.

“I prefer to sell within channels where I can easily get my money back” says Gracious Akintayo, publisher of *Essential Providence*. “You can go out of business if you depend on secular vendors. They are very arrogant and ask for too much commission, which is not very economical for a struggling Christian publisher,” he adds.

Finances

Besides the problem of circulation, not a few magazines are undergoing cash crunches. This is due to high printing costs and to a lack of sponsorships and advertisements.

No Christian magazines publish as regularly as planned at inception. They appear occasionally as they get

enough advertising support.

Virtually all of the magazines are “for profit,” but many hardly ever break even. Publishers, however, take consolation in the fact that they are fulfilling “a calling.”

“Many of us survive by God’s grace,” says Pastor Biola Longe, the interim coordinator of the new Christian Magazine and Newspaper Publishers Association of Nigeria. “It is tough to publish a Christian magazine in this country. The daily challenges are daunting.”

Despite the proliferation of Christian journals, industry growth has only been about 10 percent per year, with only a few of the publi-

cations surviving for more than two years.

“We formed this association to work together to find solutions to our common problems,” affirms Longe. “Unless we cooperate, we will be duplicating efforts.”

Longe is hopeful about the future of the work. The potential of Nigeria’s Christian market is enormous. Nigeria has twice the population of almost any other African nation—it has over 120 million people. *Operation World* says Christians comprise over 52 percent of Nigeria’s population, numbering above 58 million.

With such a great audience, no matter what challenges are ahead, Christian magazines have come to stay. Nigeria’s magazine publishers want to provide Christians with publications that serve their spiritual needs. ♦

