



BIRTHS PUBLISHING HOUSE

Patricia Adrianzén de Vergara, Peruvian poet and writer, took on the challenge of publishing her own work to get her message out to prospective readers.

Verbo Vivo, which in Spanish means “Living Word,” is a small husband-and-wife enterprise in Lima, Peru, that has published nine titles to date—above average performance in this market. It owes its existence to another publishing house that backed out of a commitment to publish a collection of poems written by Patricia Adrianzén de Vergara.

“Who wants to buy poetry?” they said to her. “I was truly disappointed,” she confesses. But her husband, Pastor Roger Vergara, challenged her not to give up. “If you want to take art to the church and the message of Christ to the world, you should not give up before you begin,” he said.

Adrianzén took up the challenge. “I will publish it myself,” she decided.

Publishing *Verbo Vivo*—the title of the collection of poems—became a husband-and-wife project. They

drew from their savings to pay for printing and the couple started scouting for printers. “Suddenly, we found ourselves in the publishing world,” says Patricia Adrianzén.

Putting the product together

The Vergaras soon found out that publishing demands more than just finding printers. First, the book had to go through a rigorous editorial process. Adrianzén’s professor, a renowned Peruvian poet, graciously agreed to review the collection and make editorial suggestions. She also agreed to write a short prologue.

The bulk of the editorial work fell on the author-publisher. “I did most of the editing myself,” recalls Adrianzén, “I spent time listening to the internal rhythms of each poem, examining the power of each image and deleting extra words to achieve verbal economy.” Still, self-editing has its limits. “I missed a few mistakes. It is really hard for an

author to see his or her own errors,” she says.

The next part of the project was to work on the aesthetics of the interior of the book. The inexperienced publishers found themselves faced with more questions than they had anticipated. What poem should come first and what sequence should others follow? Should the book be divided into sections, and, if so, should each section have a title? What type and size of font should be used? Where on the page should art be placed? What version of the Bible should be used and how should these quotations be treated? These decisions were not easy. “We saw proof after proof before we were satisfied,” recalls Adrianzén.

After making final choices about the interior of the book, the couple now had to tackle decisions concerning the cover. What should the final title of the book be? What



Here, Adrianzén is using drama, images, narration, music, and dance to promote *Verbo Vivo* to churches.

about the cover design? By this time, the Vergaras were beginning to gain some experience.

The title was the decision they tackled first. Initially, the collection was to be entitled *30 Devotional Poems*. This title was chosen to match a series of devotional aids produced by the publishers who had originally agreed to publish the book. Taking a second look, Adrianzén and Vergara began to see that this title might not work.

"We saw that the word 'devotional' made sense only in the evangelical community but might mean nothing to outsiders," says Adrianzén. The title also felt bland. "It did not communicate the life, force, power and vitality of the message of Jesus Christ."

Adrianzén and her husband had to think long and hard about what exactly they wanted the book to communicate. "What I want to communicate is that Jesus is a living God," explained Adrianzén to her husband. "At the same time, I want to show that the Word is active and alive and that through it we can communicate with God. I want something like 'God-Word.'" After much thought and discussion, the title *Verbo Vivo* clicked. "This

title joined the ideas of a living God and an active Word."

The next decision—how the cover should look—was daunting. Initially, Adrianzén was attracted to an "unusual" image of Jesus she had seen somewhere. It was a beautiful picture of

Jesus laughing, hugging and walking with his disciples. This picture was attractive to her because "it seemed so real" and "differed so much from the conventional one of Christ suffering on the cross."

Unfortunately, the image had been used on the package of a gospel music tape already on the market. Adrianzén had to settle for the next best idea—an image of Jesus smiling.

"I thought it would communicate the idea of a living God who is close to us." Decisions about color and font to be used on the cover were also made at the same time.

In retrospect, Adrianzén is not too pleased with the way decisions were made about the cover. "The selection process was too fast," she says. "With more time, we would have been able to see other alternatives." She also wishes they had asked for help. "We did not consult anyone," she recalls. The result was a cover she is not too happy with.

"The cover is acceptable to evangelical readers but to people who have nothing to do with the Church, it is not attractive—it is just one more religious image. Too late," says Adrianzén, "we learned that the title of the books and the

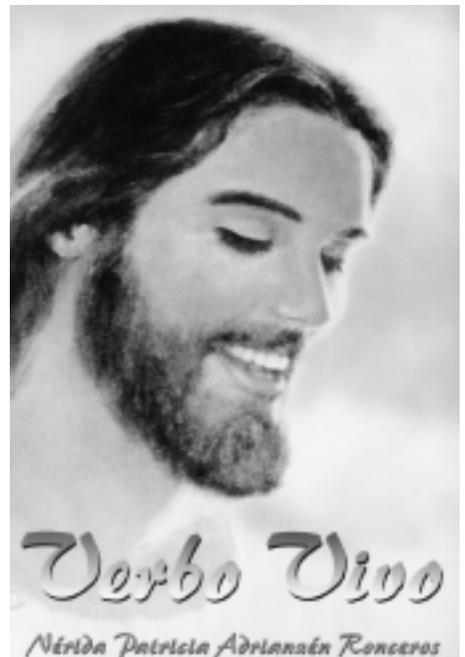
appearance of the cover were critical decisions that must be made with the reader in mind rather our own personal preferences."

Getting the message out

Verbo Vivo was finally published in 1996 but the learning period was far from over for the new publishers. As it turned out, the publishers who had disappointed Adrianzén were right. Poetry did not sell. "We soon realized that very few people are interested in poetry books." The poor reading habits of the people—including Christians—also became painfully clear. "Evangelicals in our country are part of that great percentage of people who do not read," says Adrianzén.

The couple realized that books are not always the best way to communicate a message. They had to be innovative. They decided to create a stage performance in which the message of the poems in *Verbo Vivo* could be dramatized.

"We prepared a stage production dramatizing various poems with body language using music and movement," says Adrianzén. "We invited soloists to sing about the life of Jesus, thus interspersing music with poetry." A team of communications students created video



This cover for Adrianzén's poetry book did not appeal to people outside the church.

clips on strong themes of the poems such as global violence and the lack of good care for children prevalent in Peru.

The multimedia presentation was so powerful that the Vergaras and the students started presenting it in a number of places. God used the presentations to change lives. “We saw many people of different social backgrounds and spiritual conditions moved to tears of repentance and to accept God’s call,” reports Adrianzén.

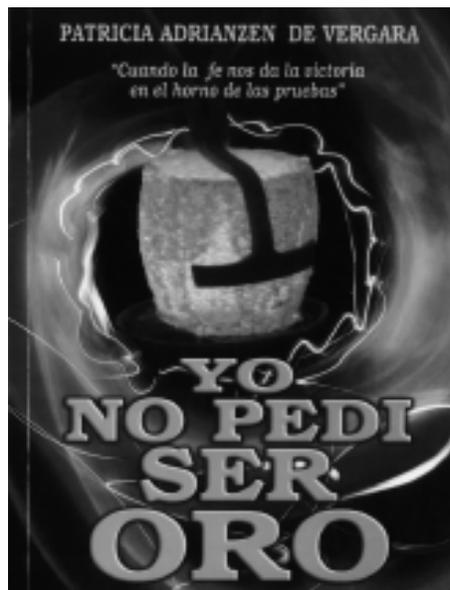
She could not believe that “God was using my poetry to reveal himself to others. He had given me the ability to communicate my art through art.” The thought was humbling. “I felt so unworthy, so insufficient, so small. I only wanted to give him all the glory.”

Another effect of the success of the dramatizations was that the book began to sell as people identified with its message. Though the sales were not good enough for the publishers to recover their investment, enough revenue came in to allow them to fund the publication of a second title.

The excitement of the success of these presentations and the sales they had generated was short-lived. Adrianzén’s purse was stolen the very day it held all the cash from the sales of the books. She nearly hit rock bottom. “I felt like a whirlwind had swept through me ... feeling violated, losing all hope, remembering the hours invested ... I asked ‘Why did God allow this?’”

Just when she thought she had reached a dead end, she was reminded of a prayer in which she had said to God “nothing else matters but to honor you with my art and to give you all the glory.” Reflecting on this prayer helped her realize that money could be stolen but her desire to communicate God’s Word through art and the joy of seeing many pass from death to life could never be taken away. This realization helped her cope with this disappointment.

By 2000, *Verbo Vivo* had touched thousands of people either through the printed copy or through the



The cover of Adrianzén’s second title illustrated a more professional look to appeal to a wider market.

drama presentations, bringing much fulfillment to the Vergaras. “It is a beautiful ministry,” says Adrianzén.

The next step

Another result of the effort of the experience of publishing *Verbo Vivo* is that Adrianzén and her husband have seen themselves turn into serious publishers. “Publishing that small book of poems—though our financial investment was never recovered—encouraged us to continue publishing.”

Not surprisingly, their start-up enterprise is called *Verbo Vivo* and has so far only published books written by Adrianzén. Their second title, *Yo no pedí ser oro* (“I did not ask to be made into gold”), which alternates narrative and poetic prose, was better received than *Verbo Vivo* had been when it was initially published.

Verbo Vivo has since published seven more titles—relative success in an economy where even the “established” Christian publishers barely produce a dozen titles per year.

Adrianzén speaks of the enterprise as “a humble and simple” company. “I am the writer, my husband is the editor,” she explains. “We invest and try to recuperate the investment, calculate profits and reinvest again in another book. We cannot do large print runs. Just knowing that a limited number of copies of a book will be able to bless others is satisfying.”

Adrianzén often reflects on her experiences. For example, how has it been publishing nine titles. “Each book is like a child,” she says “It comes with birthing pains and brings much work.”

What about the whole experience since the time she received the rejection from the publisher she had hoped would publish her first book? Adrianzén is grateful for all that has happened.

“When I look back from the start—our will and enthusiasm, our disappointments, our perseverance, our learning about publishing, our prayers, and seeing the grace of God—I can say, with a copy of *Verbo Vivo* in my hands ‘I am not sorry that I published it myself.’”❖

“Books are like children,” says Adrianzén. “They bring birthing pains, a lot of work, and joy.”