

RISE OF THE PHILIPPINES

InterLit's Kim Pettit, who visited Manila last year, outlines the significance of the Philippine market for Christian publishers.

In 1998 the Asian financial crisis struck the Philippines, and along with severe weather disasters, resulted in an economic downturn. Since then, the Philippine economy has slowly regained strength.

International views

Figures from the U.S. Commerce Department show that, for the first half of 2002, book exports to the Philippines, earning over U.S. \$8.3 million, surpassed exports to Brazil (\$5.2 million) and to South Africa (\$6 million). Moreover, though sales declined in nine of the 15 top book export markets for the U.S., sales to the Philippines grew by 1.6 percent, no small feat considering the continuing post-9/11 economic turbulence around the world.

The Philippines is a vigorous market for U.S.-based Christian publishers. In a 1999 article in *Publisher's Weekly*, Zondervan executive Paul Van Duinen reported that its fastest-growing markets were in Asia, especially English-speaking Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines. Thomas Nelson's Terry Draughon agreed, describing Asia as a "glowing star" for both English-language sales and foreign language rights. At the time, international sales of books and rights reportedly amounted to 12 percent of the company's business, with further growth expected.

"The Philippines is a very interesting market," says Ralph Gates, of Cook Communications Ministries International. "It provides sales opportunities in several different areas—distribution of imported

titles, reprints or licensing for local English-language editions, and foreign language rights for translation into Tagalog or another language."

Brisk international sales of licensing and translation rights are only one part of the story, however. They testify to the increasing strength of indigenous Christian publishing in the Philippines.

A growing industry

Often described as the only predominantly Christian country in Asia, the Philippines is the only nation in the region with a Catholic majority. About 80 percent of the estimated population of 85 million are Roman Catholic, including some 8 million charismatic Catholics. There are over 35,000 evangelical churches, and 10 percent (8.5 million) of the population is evangelical. To top it all, the Philippines has a literacy rate of over 95 percent. Thus titles appealing to the evangelical and Catholic market can potentially reach an audience of over 16 million.

All this, naturally, translates into an environment where indigenous Christian publishers can flourish. *Operation World* reports there are nearly 50 denominational and non-denominational literature agencies engaged in printing, publishing and distribution and over 100 Christian bookstores. CBA's 2002 *International Directory* lists over 20 Philippine suppliers of Christian resources. There is a strong CBA chapter, an active association of Christian editors, and a fellowship of Christian writers. Networking, mentoring,

and professional development in the industry is evident.

Filipino publishers are also active on the international scene. In 2002, 26 publishers and retailers attended the CBA International Convention, representing almost a dozen companies. Some 29 staff from nine organizations have gone through Cook's publisher training in Colorado Springs. About 140 authors, editors and publishers from 39 countries participated in Media Associates International's 2002 LittWorld conference outside Manila.

Export potential

The Philippines is the world's top labor exporter. Seven to eight million Filipinos work in over 100 countries around the world. Most are in the Middle East, yet large numbers work in Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, the United States, and in Europe. Consequently, in 2001, *Philexport*, a newsletter of the Philippine Exporters Confederation, identified the book publishing industry as one with significant potential for growth overseas.

Filipino Christian publishers want to reach foreign markets, and many are already exporting titles to Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and other countries.

The Christian publishing industry in the Philippines is on the rise. As key players in the Asian Pacific rim, Philippine publishers have the potential for strategic literature outreach for Christ in coming years. ❖