

# Why Devotional Literature is Not Published and Why it Should Be

*Zivko B. Jorgacevic, general manager of Alpha and Omega Publishing in Belgrade, Serbia, explains why publishers in Eastern Europe have not embraced this genre.*

In the Balkans of southeast Europe, the people are emotional, impulsive and more lively than perhaps any other place in the world. They live from their hearts more than their heads. This is true of their spiritual lives too. They make images and symbols for themselves to understand God through feelings, visions and colors rather than reason—just think of the religious icons that abound throughout Eastern Europe. Because of this cultural emphasis, Christian publishers spend time designing book covers and page layouts. They do not spend time publishing devotional literature.

Alpha and Omega, the publishing division of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, has published two devotionals. But, it makes no apology for publishing so little literature of this kind. Alpha and Omega's publications are geared to students and an intellectual public. However, devotional literature has also been excluded from the publishing plans of other Christian publishers in Serbia, Croatia, and Macedonia.

## ***Why devotionals are not published***

Some reasons for the lack of devotional publishing among evan-

gelicals can be traced to four main points.

First, protestant Christians do not have deep roots in Eastern Europe. In this part of the world the Orthodox Church is dominant. All other denominations are considered sects or cults. Evangelical churches in Serbia can be counted on the fingers of one hand. As a result, there are not many national authors writing devotional literature. Some Christians in Serbia receive this kind of literature from the neighboring country of Croatia. However, these are not the writings of a national author but rather translations from *Our Daily Bread*, a publication based in Grand Rapids, Michigan, United States.

Second, devotionals are costly. Editing and printing of devotionals are much higher than for any ordinary book. Devotionals often include multi-color printing, are rich in illustrations, feature expensive binding and costly paper. The potential market for this kind of literature seems limited.

Third, Christian publishing houses in Eastern Europe are not self-financing and they do not have their own resources. These publishers receive donations from Western Christian friends, and they do not

receive money for publishing devotionals. Those individuals that are willing to finance book publication usually specify their own list of titles and do not consider the needs of local people. Well-known publishing houses in this area do not have clear publishing plans or financial targets and they do not pursue becoming self-supportive or profitable.

Fourth, evangelical publishers do not consider devotionals important. It appears every kind of book is published except devotionals. The trend to give readers theology, apologetics or titles that are popular in the West, rather than any devotionals. The "important" titles must be published first. Publishing of devotionals is apparently a luxury in our world, even though Serbians enjoy this kind of literature very much.

It is likely that Serbia will not have any devotionals published anytime in the near future.

## ***Why publish this type of literature***

Exploring the potential market in Serbia and the area, there are good reasons to start thinking about publishing devotional books.

First, devotional literature is more widely accepted than other

types of books. According to one researcher in Serbia, 41 percent of those interviewed answered that “small religious groups” (such as Evangelicals) “have to be put out of practice by law and subjugated by force.” Because of the high level of religious intolerance in Serbia devotional literature may be easier to sell than other books. People in this area will not buy or receive any theological literature that comes from any publisher outside of the Serbian Orthodox Church, especially those religious titles that come with the name of a western author. Many Serbians feel their religion and faith should be nurtured and practiced only within the Serbian Orthodox Church. Anything to the contrary is considered traitorous to their nationality. (This is because the eastern Church teaches that the government and church hierarchy are one.)

**S**erbian readers are willing to receive devotional literature that does not come with a logo of a certain church or of religious publishers. Calendars with illustrations and appropriate Bible verses, fully-illustrated books with Bible stories, short devotional commentaries, daily reading booklets with biblical citations and short stories from the every day life of the Serbian people could be produced so that no one would conclude that they come from a particular church or are malicious propaganda.

Second, devotional literature can convey the message from God’s Word very effectively. Devotionals are a tool for evangelism. If a great number of people were buying devotional literature, they would have a greater opportunity to receive Jesus Christ as Savior and change their lives.

Third, devotional literature can be sold more easily than other types of books. Often, more complex titles such as theology and philosophy and apologetics cannot be sold successfully. If devotionals sell well, a publisher might profit enough from their sales to cover the losses

from publishing other titles.

Finally, devotionals are not difficult to read, and are easier to write than other types of books. It is likely a greater number of national authors would be able to write this literature. In Serbia there are not many professional theologians who are equipped to write Bible commentaries, but there are many educated Christians who could write devotional literature.

Perhaps with more frequent publishing of devotional literature written within the country, more national authors would come out of hiding and take courage to present new works of well written literature. This could be the first step in encouraging and training of evangelical authors in Serbia.

### *The potential of devotional literature*

The present situation does not allow Christian publishing houses in Eastern Europe to publish many devotionals. Indeed, as wise publishers and savvy businessmen, Christian publishers must find a way to honor the needs of their specific readership, to produce relevant and profit-making books.

Still, Christian publishers desire to promote and share in the salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ with others. This cannot be achieved without successful business plans. Including devotionals in one’s publishing plan may be one of the best ways to improve the results of the Christian publishing industry in Eastern Europe. ♦



*Above, a monk walks in a Bulgarian monastery. Evangelical publishers in southeastern Europe recognize the influence the Eastern Orthodox faith has in their markets.*