



Publishers should not lament the lack of writers when they are not doing enough to develop and retain the few that God has brought their way.

by Isaac Phiri

Point Persecuted to **Christ**

I have never been persecuted for my faith in Christ. I have suffered racial, ethnic and nationality injustices here and there. But I have never suffered for religion.

The theme of publishing and persecution is a difficult one for many believers around the world who, like me, have never been persecuted for their faith in Christ.

What do we say? One temptation is to claim that we identify. But do we? Can we? Take the experiences of Christians in parts of India told in this issue. Or in Pakistan where religious laws make it hard to proclaim the supremacy of Christ. Can we honestly say we know how Pakistani Christians on trial under these laws feel?

What to do

The other dilemma is: What do we do? One option is advocacy. Mount international pressure on nations where Christians are under persecution. Some fine organizations have adopted this response. While advocacy is commendable, it seems to me to have a thin biblical basis. The idea of a Christian version of Amnesty International is foreign to the New Testament. On the contrary, Jesus told us to prepare for the worst. International advocacy can sometimes aggravate situations, making things harder for local Christians. It often focuses on newsy situations but does little for ordinary Christians.

Another option is prayer. This sounds good, but how many of us bruise our knees praying for the persecuted? It is not easy to maintain fervent prayer for people far from our reality. Most of us pray only after a news flash. Even more difficult is what to pray. That persecution stop? That Christians not give up? That the oppressive government is toppled? When I say such prayers they feel hollow and unrealistic.

A temptation for people like me is to hero-worship persecuted Christians. Such Christians become stars. Is this what the persecuted want? Is this what God wants?

Does he place some in ministry in difficult places so they can gain celebrity status?

Obviously, this issue of *InterLit* is a difficult one for us. It brought us face to face with the limits of our Christian experiences. It left us with little to say or do.

I wonder if this is a common dilemma in publishing. What do you do with a pastor who has been in jail for years for proclaiming Christ? Or with a teenager who was abducted and forced to convert to another religion? Do you claim to understand? Do you promise to pray? Do you make them heroes? Do you become their champion?

Possible responses

We do not listen enough in publishing. We think we understand these experiences and rush to churn out books and magazines without thorough reflection. Instead, we should seek to discern what God intends for us to learn from the persecuted church. Only then will our publishing be effective.

We need to let the persecuted speak for themselves. Think of Luke, author and publisher of Acts. He traveled and suffered with Paul, yet we hardly hear or see him. We see God and the apostles in action, not the author. Luke is an invisible observer but determined disseminator (read publisher).

Lesson: Tell the story as is, without exaggeration. In the US, books and articles have been published about Christians who said they were persecuted. Creative writers or editors spiced their stories for greater sales or to draw attention to the situation, but we need to keep ourselves out of the picture.

If we have to say anything at all to the persecuted, it should point them to Christ. Contrary to my sheltered experience, Christ was persecuted. He suffered and died in the service of the Father. He knows what to say. He knows what to pray. He is the Great High Priest, Author and Finisher of our faith. The articles in this issue of *InterLit* point to Christ. ❖

New Day Publishing for a



Stephen Kayanga, manager of New Day Publishers in Khartoum, Sudan, reports on how his publishing house brings hope to Christians in Sudan despite the cost of persecution.

The mission of New Day Publishers (NDP) is to bring hope and growth to Christians in Sudan through literature. This is in direct conflict to the purpose of the ruling National Islamic Front (NIF) which wants to eradicate Christianity in the country. But NDP stands to please God not men. Therefore, its small team continues to carry the cross each day despite the weight and cost.

At the beginning

Sudan's civil war dates back to 1955 when fighting erupted between the Arab (and mostly Muslim) northerners and the Black (and mostly Christian) southerners. In 1962, the Muslim-controlled government passed a Missionary Act restricting Christian activities to southern Sudan and forbidding such activities in the Muslim north. In 1964, all missionaries working in Sudan were forced to leave the country as the war escalated.

In 1972, after 17 long years of civil war, a truce was established between the government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA)—the resistance movement of the south. The truce brought a

flicker of hope for a new day in the country and so the name New Day Publishers. Founded in 1972 in Juba, the largest city in southern Sudan, NDP is the publishing arm of the Episcopal Church of the Sudan. NDP was established with two purposes. First, it was to reproduce Christian literature and church resources lost during the 17 years fighting. Second, NDP was to meet the literature needs of all the churches in the country by publishing materials in English, Arabic and in indigenous languages.

Sadly, the truce did not last. In 1983, the government declared the country an Islamic state and imposed the Sharia (Islamic law) on all Sudanese, including non-Muslims. This move renewed hostilities between the government and SPLA. SPLA forces and government troops resumed combat. The SPLA eventually engulfed Juba (where NDP was based) and pounded the city with shells. In 1989, at least 20 long-range artillery motor shells would hit the city daily. By 1990, the city was paralyzed. The NDP staff, not sure they would survive the intense shelling, closed down the Juba operation.

A second start

Believing that God is never defeated, the NDP staff and leaders of the Episcopal Church regrouped and planned to restart publishing. After much work and overcoming many obstacles, an office for NDP was established in northern Sudan at Khartoum, the country's capital and a bastion of Islam. The office was opened in 1996 with three computers, a Risograph Printer and a commitment to providing literature to Sudanese Christians again.

NDP escaped the fighting in the south, but now had to deal with legal and political restrictions imposed on Christian publishing by the Islamic state. In the mid-1990s, new Islamic laws placed greater restrictions on Christian activities in Sudan. The laws made it very clear that no Christian literature could be imported. Before this time, Sudanese churches could import Christian books into the country.

Though the National Islamic Front government's policy is to wipe out Christianity from Sudan, they have not openly banned the production of Christian literature by indigenous publishing houses.



Down in Sudan

Instead, the government has imposed difficult procedures. First, current laws require NDP to get government clearance for each book to be published. Second, the government has also imposed extremely high taxes on Christian books. NDP battles with three types of government taxes to be paid before production of each title. The first tax is the normal business tax. The second is for the so-called “holy war” in the country, and the third is for “Zakaa,” an Islamic Charity Society. These three taxes, plus the generally high production costs of a book in Sudan, makes the selling price of a book rocket beyond what the mostly displaced church community can afford. It is clear the National Islamic Front government hopes to put both secular (non-Islamic) publishers and NDP out of business.

The suffering church

Because of the ongoing civil war, most Christians in Sudan have lost their jobs. They live in refugee camps around the suburbs of Khartoum. They face the merciless desert dust and heat all year. Christian men and women, who at one time held responsible positions in their communities in southern Sudan, now survive by doing petty

jobs for a piece of bread each day. Men sweep the streets or perform hard physical labor on construction sites and on farms. Women wash dishes and clothes of the rich families so they can get a little bread to feed their children who have been starving the whole day.

Most children in the displacement camps cannot go to school. Their parents cannot afford school uniforms, shoes, textbooks and

other supplies.

In the refugee camps the government distributes food through an Islamic relief agency. To receive food, one must be a Muslim. Some have professed Islam just to get food and survive.

Sudanese Christians are not only displaced. They also see church buildings seized or burned, pastors and lay leaders killed and Christian children kidnapped and sent to Islamic schools [see sidebar].

CHRISTIAN CHILDREN KIDNAPPED

One day in 1990, I was playing on a street in Juba with five other children. Suddenly a car stopped near us. The driver asked us if he could take us for a ride. All of us were excited and happily accepted the offer. He drove very fast and took us to the airport. We all started to cry but no one listened. We were placed in a room with over thirty other children. Some children were only one or two years old. The kidnapers gave us some candy. Then, we were herded to some military aircraft, and flown to Khartoum. From the Khartoum airport, we were taken to a town called Hawat, past the Gedaref Agricultural Scheme over 400 kilometers from Khartoum, and from there we were taken to a remote village called Hanan.

In this village we were taught the basics of the Islamic faith for two years. After that we went to Primary School for eight years. I was brought to Khartoum to start Secondary School education. Once in Khartoum, I asked about my relatives, hoping to find some in Khartoum. One day I met a man from my tribe. After telling him my story, he went and got my uncle who came and smuggled me home. School authorities still do not know my whereabouts. If they find out, we will be in trouble. When I left the ghost village of Hanan where we were kept, there were 72 girls and over 300 boys undergoing the Islamic School.

—as told to Stephen Kayanga by Lucia Osman Morobe, a Christian girl from southern Sudan.

In 1996, the churches in the towns of Toror and Berera were razed to the ground and clergymen of the Episcopal Church of Sudan [mother body of NDP] killed. In April 1996, leaders of the Episcopal Church in the Nuba mountains reported to the Christian Solidarity International delegation that government troops burned 26 churches in the past few years. One evangelical leader reported that his Church, with 2000 members, had no ordained clergy left. The evangelical leader also alleged government troops executed two catechists of this church. A victim named Kamal Tutu, was reportedly tied up and thrown into a burning church.

In February 1998, the government confiscated a building that belongs to the Catholic Church in Khartoum. It is now used as an Islamic conference center. The

Christian organizations in the country continue to encourage the Christians not to give up. NDP hymn books and prayer books enrich the worship and devotional life of the churches. To get Christian books where they are most needed, NDP staff regularly visits churches and pastors throughout the country. NDP staff reaches Christians in the war-ravaged city of Juba by hitchhiking on military cargo planes delivering supplies to government troops.

Back in 1972 when NDP was founded, there was hope for a new day in Sudan. The last 28 years have been extremely difficult. The civil war continues. Efforts to eradicate Christianity escalate making it extremely difficult for NDP to publish. But NDP sees all this as part of Christ's call to carry the cross. The difficulties represent the weight of



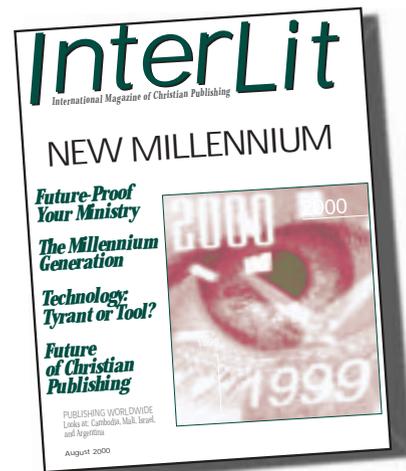
The National Islamic Front is determined to wipe out Christianity in Sudan.

diocesan headquarters of the Episcopal Church of Sudan, where New Day Publishers has its offices, constantly operates under the threat of being confiscated at gunpoint.

Encouraging the church

The National Islamic Front is determined to wipe out Christianity in Sudan but NDP and other

the cross. The most critical question is: Will NDP carry the cross to the end or will it throw it down and walk away?❖



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