

What is the Future of



David Mehlis, of Cook Communications (www.ccmi.org) is "optimistic about what literature can do."

I am very optimistic with what literature can do for Christ and the kingdom around the world.

At the individual level, there is a spiritual hunger not seen at other times. People know there is something missing in their lives. Good literature can speak to this spiritual need. If we are not in Christian publishing to change lives for the kingdom, then we are really just business persons making money in the religious field.

At a governmental level, various nations that may have been resistant to the gospel are now more open. We can point to a number of countries where it was very difficult to communicate the gospel, but now there is some openness—in some cases significant openness. Stability may continue in many countries in the world. There have not been any major world conflicts for some time.

The literacy rate is growing in almost every part of the world. It is emphasized in the non-Western world, especially in China and in India. Education is considered very important.

In the next 25 years, three billion people will die and six billion will be born. They all need to have a chance to hear the gospel. Every three days there are enough births to populate a city about the size of San Francisco. How are those people going to respond to Christ? We have more resources than ever before in history to bring the word of God to every person in our world. Publishers need to work together to help each reach people in their own languages and in their own

cultures.

Praise God that the Church, in other parts of the world, is growing stronger. God is

moving hearts and working mighty miracles around the world. We should encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ and partner with them to proclaim the gospel to people in every country. ❖

There is a spiritual hunger not seen at other times.

The Evangelical Christian Publishers Association's "Think Global II" conference held April 27-May 1, 2002 in Colorado Springs, Colorado, United States, included a panel on the future of Christian publishing, moderated by Butch Dickerson, trainer of book-sellers in Bulgaria, Egypt, Hong Kong, Hungary and many other countries. Following are comments from the conference along with responses from other publishers.

Christian Publishing?

We are living in a rather troubled world. Both hemispheres are experiencing different degrees of trouble. This is a great opportunity for Christian publishing. As people search for answers, we can provide them. As publishers, we should open our eyes wider and listen a little harder to the needs of the people so that our titles will indeed be products that impact lives.

There is a great opportunity for the Christian publishing community, particularly from the developed world, to build bridges with their brothers and sisters from the South, to transfer skills, knowledge and raise the standards in the developing world. Publishers in the North can identify potential down in the South and take publishers through a process of mentoring, of helping them to reach the next level. There is an opportunity to build strong, lasting relationships, built on mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual trust.

We can also develop strong vibrant local associations. As David Mehlis indicated, no one group, no one person or organization can by itself reach our countries for Christ. At home there is some uneasiness among the publishers and book-sellers, an unwillingness to work together, yet I see the future of Christian publishing as a great opportunity for associations and partnerships. ❖

***We have the
opportunity
to build
strong
partnerships.***



David Waweru (dawaweru@bcsl.org) of Cana Publishing in Nairobi, Kenya sees "living in a troubled world" as "a great opportunity for Christian publishing."

What is the Future of Christian Publishing?



"It is critical to create a reading culture now," says Lois Semenyé (Lois.Semenye@clmc.or.ke), managing director of Christian Learning Materials Centre in Nairobi, Kenya.

***More publishing
in local languages
will be necessary.***

Globalization and free markets have brought all kinds of Christian literature to urban Africa. High quality imported books are available in large quantities, and local books produced with higher costs must be priced below cost to compete. Even so, there is a great future for African publishing houses. They have the opportunity to address the culture from within. Foreign books do not address the unique experiences of Africans.

Global culture is spreading fast through electronic media, yet it does not reach all rural areas where some ethnic groups are growing in size and in literacy. Moreover, each culture is dynamic and is evolving its own identity. In Zimbabwe, where English is the primary language, people are increasing their requests for materials in Shona, Ndebele, and other local languages. The same thing is happening in other countries. More publishing in local languages will be necessary, especially as the Bible is translated for more tribes.

Despite the popularity of electronic media, print materials are still needed. Though 65 percent of

Kenya's population are young people, only 10,000 Kenyan children are estimated to have exposure to computers. Textbook publishing is big business. Literacy is increasing and the number of potential buyers is exploding. It is critical to create a reading culture now.

This is not to minimize the challenge faced by publishers. Poverty in Africa has reduced profit margins and caused publishers to control retail prices. A question I often hear on sales trips in rural East Africa is, "Do I put bread on the table for my children, or buy books?" I know the answer: food first, then books. In this environment publishers have to be strategic. Uzima and Evangel, two Christian publishing houses in Kenya, shut down their printing operations to control costs and focus on core competencies. On our troubled continent, publishers must operate with lean budgets.

Another challenge is distribution. I shipped some books from Kenya to Gambia and Sudan. To my dismay, the books took over a year to reach the customers. In the absence of a good infrastructure, publishers must consider how to

develop printing stations in rural areas, to meet the massive needs. If peace allows for the completion and maintenance of planned continental roads from Capetown to Cairo, there will be many more opportunities for African companies to specialize in distribution.

There are many people seeking to grow in the Lord. The popularity of Christian television, the increase in the number of mega churches, are evidence that the number of Christians continues to grow in sub-Saharan Africa. Good Christian literature plays an important role in nurturing the Church. We must produce materials that will equip and nurture believers, helping those who are in remote areas to grow in their faith despite new challenges. Editorial content must be sensitive to cultural and tribal differences to nurture the faith of African readers. Publishers must do better promotion of their products, yet at the same time continue to produce cost-effective, affordable goods. The future of publishing in Africa is very promising, but there are many hurdles to overcome. ❖



Gerry Davey (GerryDavey@email.com), Eastern European Literature Advisory Committee, wants more resources to be committed to developing indigenous publishers.

***We need an
adequate apologetic
for the uniqueness
of Christ.***

Increasingly look on life as a series of opportunities brilliantly disguised as problems. With that as a general way of looking at what is the future of Christian publishing in the world, the first observation is that there will be a far greater range of formats. The smudgy ink on dead trees will still be there, but the electronic formats will also sell.

One of the consequences of globalization is that English is increasingly becoming the language of the powerful, whether they are Christians or not. However, just because English is becoming more common, does not mean that Anglo-Saxon thought forms are any more common. Commonality of language does not necessarily mean commonality of thought. I see an increasingly pluralistic society in many areas of the world. This is true not just in the West, but in Asia as well. That leads me to the conclusion that Christian publishers will need to have an adequate apologetic in their own culture for the uniqueness of Christ. I would put that high on the list for any indigenous publisher as well as a Western publisher.

Another mark of globalization is a turmoil in the area of identity, individual identity, ethnic identity, national identity. One of the effects of globalization is nearly always dehumanization. As publishers, we should be encouraging texts that will show the church as a community meeting this crisis of identity.

At the same time, one mark of globalization is that there is already a global youth culture. When some item is released in Hollywood, it is simultaneously released in Bombay and Bangkok. Christian publishers who are developing books for teens and young adults need to pay attention to this situation.

Technology makes a global youth culture possible, and will affect us in other ways as well. I personally am convinced that there will be cloning of humans in our lifetime. As we develop Christian books, the whole area of ethics should be to the forefront of our thinking.

On the socioeconomic front, my observation is that there is a very rapid increase of wealth throughout the world, and especially an increasing middle class in places

such as India, the Philippines, and soon, in China. So, for publishers to focus material on that new wealthy middle class would be a strategic move.

Finally, time and time again I have seen that indigenous publishers are looking for more training, more “know-how,” more expertise and more guidance. I plan to continue training overseas publishers as I am invited to do so. I have also seen a necessity to sharpen my focus from training indigenous publishers to training trainers of indigenous publishers, to move from addition to multiplication. ❖

What is the Future of Christian Publishing?



"We must change our measures of success," says Marsh Moyle, director of the Bratislava, Slovakia SEN Study Community (www.citygate.org).

In globalization we underestimate the deep anger, profound insecurities, and the real sense of disenfranchisement that people feel. The question is, how are Christian publishers going to deal with those kinds of issues? The issues of identity are critical for belief in God and maturity in the faith. With the development of the European Union there are huge questions about identity. There was *homo sovieticus* and now there is *homo bureaucraticus*. What percentage of my budget can possibly be given to study these issues in depth? Who in the Christian community will

We need profound content grounded in the Word.

invest the time and money, so as to properly address them? Thinking through these things is a huge challenge. However, it is only after the thinking process is completed that Christians can write and publish to those issues. We need profound content, grounded in the Word, to effectively address the pain of the people.

When we look at the phenomena of Harry Potter, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Prayer of Jabez*, and the Left Behind series, we see that these books have to do with two critical issues: power and transcendence. Those are two issues that Christian publishers have to address.

How are we measuring success? Are we measuring, not only the

bottom line, but also how well we spread the Christian message? What do we intend to change through our publishing in the next 15 years? What drives our publishing? Sales and revenue statistics must play a very significant role in the publisher's activities but they can sometimes drive our editorial policy. Therefore we publish titles that are popular, rather than meeting the real needs of people. One thing I hope to see in the future of Christian publishing is that we will measure success in terms of changed attitudes, changed lives, changed societies, and a changed world. ❖



"More cooperation is needed in Russian publishing," says Alexei Bodrov, rector of St. Andrew's Biblical Theological College (www.standrews.ru) in Moscow, Russia.

In Russia, as in many other countries, it is extremely important to develop national writers and indigenous publishing. It is also a great challenge. It is much easier to secure funds to translate a book than to sponsor a national writer.

However, the publishing industry in Russia is far more stable at this time than it has been in the past. Popular books can be sold at affordable prices, and sometimes they are even profitable.

Academic books are difficult. They are quite costly to develop, consuming time and energy. We are forced to sell them under cost. We would like to publish more evangelical academic books, which are especially important for Russia,

a mostly Orthodox country, but need financial support to do so.

There is a definite lack of real professionalism among Christian publishers in Russia. There are many who enter Christian publishing because of their enthusiasm, only to realize later that not only enthusiasm is essential, but also professionalism. This is a most important challenge, and I certainly want to continue efforts to do something in this direction.

With greater cooperation, Christian publishers in Russia will be much more successful. ❖



We need to be intentional about developing indigenous publishing

"Non-Western Christians can greatly enrich Christian thought and discussion," affirms Sharon Mumper, director of the Magazine Training Institute (www.magazinetraining.com) in Vienna, Austria.

To address the future of Christian publishing around the world, I want to mention three things.

First, we discussed globalization, the growing acceptance of certain cultural morays, standards and styles throughout the world. Around the world, Hollywood movies have an enormous impact. Everywhere in Europe, MTV is blaring in restaurants and public places. This could lead us to believe that people are more alike than they really are, but the similarities are on a superficial level. Deep down, people groups hold different attitudes and opinions. They have different personal and societal expectations and cultural norms. Christian publishers, like secular publishers, tend to believe that one size fits all. They may think it unnecessary to invest the time, energy and finances required to develop a strong indigenous publishing industry. They might ask, "Why not simply translate good

English books and distribute them?" In the future, indigenous publishing could come to be seen as an unnecessary luxury. That would be a great disservice to the people who need literature, not just in their language, but that speaks to their hearts. We need to be intentional about developing indigenous publishing.

Second, we know the center of Christianity has shifted from the West to the East and the South. The last half century has seen tremendous growth of Christianity outside of Europe and America. However, Western voices still dominate Christian publishing. We need to realize that non-Western Christians can enrich Christian thought and discussion. The publishers that are willing to work with non-Western authors, or non-Western publishers, have the potential to do real service to the body of Christ—and to prove to the non-Christian world that Christianity is not a white man's religion.

Third, along with globalization, standardization, and the McDonaldization of the world, people everywhere are becoming more nationalistic. Look at the number of countries with rebel groups demanding independent status. People groups who for decades or even centuries were able to live and function together in a single country today cannot bear to share the same backyard fence. Relationships, families and countries are being torn apart all over the world and violence against minorities is on the upswing. Do Christian publishers have a responsibility to speak prophetically into this situation? I believe they do. However, it will take effort to find those voices that can command respect and speak peace into the storm. Publishers will need creativity and godly wisdom to find ways to package and to distribute books that can make a difference. ❖

What is the Future of Christian Publishing?

Dream. Dare. Do.

China is changing rapidly, and this is creating opportunities for overseas publishers.

According to commitments made by China at the World Trade Organization, soon foreign companies will be able to launch joint ventures with domestic counterparts. In a year, printing and retail businesses for books, magazines, video and audio products in China will be permitted. Wholesale business will be permitted in three years. Publishing of Christian literature is not on the list of approved joint ventures at present, but this is still a promising development.

There are two channels of Christian publishing in China. First of all, there is the China Christian Council (CCC), the official religious channel. The CCC commission on literature ministry publishes Christian literature. The CCC also has a commission of Bible publishing, which is the only entity with official permission to publish Bibles. So far, CCC has printed 28 million Bibles and 200 books, from sermons to theology to hymnals. Most are reprints of Christian classics; a few are new titles by local authors, and others are translations.

Christian Communications Limited (CCL), in Hong Kong, started publishing books through CCC in 1995. We have since published six titles, including a Bible encyclopedia, a Bible commentary from InterVarsity Press, and *What the Bible is All About*, by Henrietta Mears. Materials published with

CCC are classified for internal circulation only among churches. They do not have an ISBN and cannot be sold in public bookstores. The CCC is very important, because it has a very well established network of distribution.

The second channel for Christian publications in China is through secular publishers. There are more than 550 state-owned publishing houses in China. Last year, they had a combined annual income of U.S.\$502 billion and published 130,000 titles. Of these, 7,300 titles were translations licensed by foreign publishers abroad. Only a few were from Christian publishers.

In recent years secular publishers in China have published books with Christian content, mostly related to the Bible or Christian culture and history. More recently, as Focus on the Family has aired on radio stations in China, secular publishers have been open to books on family relationships or management with Christian values. Some Christian fiction, like the Left Behind series, has also been published. Bestsellers attract secular publishers looking for books that will generate a profit. CCL began partnering with secular publishers in China in 1998. Our latest release is a translation of the Moody Press book *Management By Proverbs: Applying Timeless Wisdom in The Workplace*, by Michael A. Zigarelli.



"Who will supply the 90 million Chinese Christians expected just a decade from now?" asks Thomas Tang, general secretary of Christian Communications Limited (www.ccl.org.hk) in Hong Kong.

CCL has published about 15 titles this way.

Prior to 1949, the number of Christians in China was less than 1 million. Today officially there are 15 million Christians, and this number is increasing by half a million each year. Moreover, estimates are that membership in house churches, non-registered churches, may be as high as 45 million people, for an unofficial total of about 60 million Christians. A decade from now, in 2012, the unofficial estimates are that there will be 90 million Christians in China from a population of 1.5 billion people. However, official statistics show there are less than 4,000 trained Christian graduates of 22 Bible schools or seminaries at present. Fewer than 3,000 are ordained as pastors. Each pastor looks after an average of 10,000 Christians. Churches in China rely heavily on lay leaders, volunteers who receive only short-term training. Christian literature can help lay workers to preach, teach, and pastor the

churches in the absence of trained leaders. Also, Christian literature can equip the students in the seminaries, Bible schools and training centers.

Christian publishers outside China have excellent resources, contacts, experience and expertise. They can offer the editorial, marketing, distribution, and financial management training necessary to have well-equipped Christian publishing professionals in China. We must also recruit and develop more Chinese Christian authors.

How can we proceed towards the future? Dream, dare and do. Dream, then pray. Dare to deal with all sorts of difficulties. Finally, do. Take action. Visit China and build strong relationships. Partnerships with Chinese Christians or ministry organizations can help you cope with the great cultural differences between East and West. Partnerships can ensure books meet real needs and appeal to the Chinese audience, build distribution networks, and facilitate evaluation.

Finally, have love. Realize that a book published overseas should not be just a contract, but a ministry. Are you ready to mobilize your resources to participate in building God's kingdom in China? We need your love, prayers, encouragement and partnership. ❖

***Make
better
use of
secular
sales
channels.***



"God may use secular means to get books into new areas," says Peter Cunliffe (cunliffes@compuserve.com), founder and president of Christian World Publishers in Davies, California, United States.

I too am optimistic about the future of Christian publishing around the world.

Christian publishers overseas are finding new distribution channels. Editions Farel, in France, and Editora Mundo Cristão, in Brazil, are using the Internet to reach people in cities and towns where there are no Christian bookstores. In Brazil, Mundo Cristão collaborates with churches. It is illegal for churches to have bookstores, but with a portable kiosk it is possible to have sales within the church for two weeks each month. That is just one innovative idea; there are many other ways to increase distribution.

Other publishers are thinking globally and not just selling in their own countries. Again, Editions Farel sells in about 25 countries around the world where French is spoken. They export almost 40 percent of all of their sales.

In the future, God may use some very secular means to get books into new areas. We cannot dismiss

the fact that one fifth of the world's population lives in China. Right now China is closed to the idea of a Christian publishing house located on the mainland, but with China joining the World Trade Organization, I have great hopes that this may eventually change.

Too often, when American publishers think of success they think in terms of books sold or revenue. U.S. publishers have a responsibility before God, and a privilege, of entering into partnerships with overseas publishers.

Publishers in the United States should become more open to the idea of allowing English-language editions to be published in other countries to lower costs. I would like to challenge them to share their expertise and knowledge with overseas publishers, to train them so those publishers can be more effective, become self-sustaining and develop national authors in their own countries. ❖

What is the Future of Christian Publishing?



“Use creative ways to communicate Christian truth,” says John Maust, of Media Associates International (www.litworld.org) in Bloomington, Illinois, United States.

Last year, at a writer workshop in Albania, a banner on the front wall of the conference room proclaimed: “Without spiritual renewal, our country cannot be transformed.” Writers were writing, and publishers were publishing, because they intend to transform Albanian society through the written word.

Among the publishing contacts Media Associates International has in the hard places of the world, I see this same passion to transform entire nations through the written word. Our contacts recognize the primary need of seeing individuals turn to Christ, but they also hold a global view for publishing’s impact on society. So, I share Marsh Moyle’s hope that in the future we will measure success in Christian publishing through changed lives and a changed world.

A Latin American Christian publisher recently made her first trip to Europe. After she returned home, she wept and cried out to God for a week. Having seen the industrialized economies of Western Europe, she became filled with indignation. Why was her country—so rich in natural resources—still underdeveloped and plagued by poverty?

Christian drama, poetry and fiction will help publishers to transform societies.

Corruption, greed and spiritual darkness were keeping the country in bondage, she determined, and her Christian publishing efforts must address those evils and help her nation go forward.

In coming years, indigenous publishers will increasingly use indirect means—drama, poetry, novels, short stories—to communicate Christian truths to general readers. They are reaching readers in creative ways. In some countries, governments are turning to the Church for help in the development of values-based textbooks and curriculum for required religious education courses.

One Albanian publisher received enthusiastic permission from the nation’s Ministry of Education to distribute its Christian children’s magazine in the nation’s schools. In Thailand, Bridge Communications is encouraging local secular publishers to publish books that promote Christian values. Through Bridge’s efforts, in just a few years 20 publishers have taken almost 150 titles. Bridge is also publishing a magazine for the country’s Ministry of Health.

I appreciated Peter Cunliffe’s challenge that Western publishers “share their expertise and knowledge with overseas publishers.” Cunliffe, Davey and others have modeled how to provide this train-

ing, and I can only hope they will multiply. Certainly thousands of readers around the world have been impacted for Christ through their training to strengthen local Christian publishers. As David Waweru indicated, such training is welcomed, particularly “mentoring [to] reach the next level.”

Many Christian publishers in Africa, Asia and Latin America face a constant lack of capital for the editorial development of new titles, reprinting of popular backlist titles, and marketing. Compounding the problem is the extremely low purchasing power in countries where disposable income for books is scarce. Western publishers could provide targeted grants for publishing capital, or consider annual “tithes” to some selected Christian publishers or to a publisher training program. However, I would couple any financial investment in an indigenous publisher with hands-on training and interaction on topics as basic as developing business plans.

Finally, I heartily endorse Gerry Davey’s plan to sharpen his focus “from training indigenous publishers to training the trainers of indigenous publishers.” This will be especially effective as we equip and deploy publisher trainers from all the world regions, not just the West. ❖