

Publisher Interviews Author Boer¹

FOR ISLAMICA PAGE

Jan Boer is the author of the series *Studies in Christian-Muslim Relations*, which was completed in 2009. With 30 years experience working in Nigeria serving the Institute of Church and Society, the Christian Council of Nigeria, Christian Health Association of Nigeria, the Theological College of Northern Nigeria, the University of Jos and the Christian Reformed Church of Nigeria, he is using his experience to shed light on social and religious conflicts in the area. The eight-book series and accompanying CD resource showcase both sides of the arguments about violence, Sharia law, secularism and more.

He recently took some time to reflect on his publishing experience with us. for more information about his work and books, visit his website, www.SocialTheology.com.

What challenges did you encounter in the writing process?

The main challenges were three-fold. One was to persist in this gigantic project of 8 volumes and well over 2,000 pages - I did not count them. The second was not to get sloppy in my research, documentation, accuracy, etc. The third was to remember what I wrote in earlier volumes and be consistent with that.

What has the reaction been like to your book?

Though people in the Western world pretend to be interested in Muslim affairs for various reasons, I have found very few people in North America interested enough in buying. When people find out that it deals with Nigeria and not with the Middle East or the West, they mostly drop their interest and mutter something about how interesting this all is. Muslims in Canada, most of whom come from the Near or Middle East, also drop their interest when they hear it is about Nigeria.

True, these volumes address the Nigerian situation and there the situation is very different. It started negatively. Sellers were afraid the first book and subsequent ones might cause more riots. By the time the later ones arrived they became very popular and people are calling for more. One state governor ordered all his department heads to order a set for their department and familiarize themselves

¹ "Meet Our Authors," in *Essence News*, March/2010.

with the content.

Do you have plans for future books?

Once a writer, always a writer. One does not stop. Having been a missionary for thirty years, I am writing our memoirs. After that, most likely a book of short chapters about Canadian secularism, Christianity and related subjects. Also some blogs. My Nigeria volumes will be turned into e-books.

What has been the most exciting part of your publishing experience?

My most exciting experience has been to watch the turn-around in Nigeria from negative and hostile to positive and eager. Also to receive enquiries from Nigerian students, who use these books for their own research.

What would you say is your most interesting writing quirk?

Though the topic is very serious and even sensitive in Nigeria and though the entire project is based on academically-responsible research, I follow my own style and do not get stuck in academic niceties. I throw in the odd personal remark-humorous, personal and sometimes even some sarcasm. I also throw in Hausa sentences and phrases. Sometimes I switch from third person to second by directly addressing my target audience at that moment. Sometimes I become personal and move into first person.

Do you have any advice for first-time authors?

This is the toughest, since my series is quite different from other Essence publications. But one issue is important. If you know in your heart that your project is inspired by the Spirit of God, do not let anything stop you - not even lack of money or opposition. These problems will be overcome, sometimes in unexpected ways, as they were in my case.