

There is hardly a more international printing organization

PRINTING THE **WORD** IN 413 LANGUAGES

The Jehovah's Witnesses Watchtower magazine is printed twice a month - more than 27 million copies are published simultaneously in 153 different languages. In addition, Bible literature is available in 413 languages, including Greenlandic, Palauan and Yapese.

The organization is busy preaching and teaching the Bible's message in 235 countries, with no hierarchy or clerical class, but volunteers operating with high professionalism, enthusiasm and drive.

The Italian Printery Office, in the midst of well kept gardens in the northern suburbs of Rome, is the branch which leads the purchasing of paper for the printing houses owned by the Jehovah's Witnesses in different countries. It can easily be recognized that printing has an important place in their organization.

"Thanks to printing, we are able to reach the largest possible number of people in any part of the world. The printing and binding of manuals for the comprehension of the Bible are an important part of our activities. Even the printing of Bibles has a very particular importance," affirms **Gianfranco Andreotti**, responsible for the Printery Office, accompanied by Giuseppe Comodi, member of the Printery Office at the Congregazione Cristiana dei Testimoni di Geova.

Probably no other product in the world has experienced such a change in production technology than the Holy texts of the Bible. Most of the early writings were done on scrolls. By the second century AD., the codex, or leaf-book, was developed. This was more economical and easier to use. The Christians were in the forefront of its use, as they saw its value in spreading the news about the Kingdom of God. It is no surprise therefore, that Jehovah's Witnesses have been in some respects among those in the forefront of the printing industry.

The Watchtower magazine was published for the first time in 1879. In early 1920, the organization decided to print on their own to avoid delays in publication and to make Bibles and other publications available at a low cost. A printing machine was bought to start production in a factory in Brooklyn, New York. From that time everything was used that was offered: from typographic printing with slates of lead to the high velocity offset printing of today.

To support four-color printing, a computerized pre-press system had to be developed; and the decision to go ahead with this was made in 1977. The internal software could process material for publication in all 413 languages. "One of the latest steps has been the purchase of seven offset printers of the speed of 90,000 sheets per hour. Additionally, we use various machines to speed up the bindery and the shipping of our publications," Comodi explains.



text: Thomas Barbieri photos: Herman; Thomas Barbieri



A printed page is something concrete

Even though the Jehovah's Witnesses have an official website where it is possible to see information in 264 different languages, and they have increased the production of CD and DVD audio of Bible literature, the printed message is still the most important.

"Reading a magazine or a book is the best way to spread the Bible message in places far away from technology and for people who do not have any means of support. The printed page is always something concrete. When you read the Bible in a relaxing atmosphere, having a book in your hands is different from having a computer. Considering this, there will always be a notable use of the printed page," both Andreotti and Comodi believe.

Indeed, the specific needs of those using the Bible must be considered when purchasing paper and other materials for printing. "In book production for example we decided to use polyurethane glue in book covers for all publications, e.g. the Bible, since they are used in Africa and Siberia, where there are extreme climatic changes, humidity, etc. Thus the polyurethane glue prevents cracking and books falling apart.

Note that our publications are not only for reading, but studying too, and they are used over and over again," Comodi points out.

For printing the Bibles, they use paper grades which provide clear reading and a long life. All Jehovah's Witnesses regularly handle the Bible each day. The paper used for the magazines works well in a four-color process and, above all, provides good legibility. Two fundamental characteristics are thus the opacity and the paper's performance on the print machine. The machine ability does not only include good characteristics in printing but also the stability of the paper during printing and folding. The reaction to humidity is another important factor and of course a basic criterion for printing the Bibles and books is also the thickness of paper.

"For the magazine and the books we generally use MFC 54 g/m² paper, but there are also publications printed with double coated free sheet paper of 115-200 g/m². When printing covers, we use cardboard of about 200 g/m², resistant to folds and usury. Even the use of special cardboard has an important role. These special materials are used for the Bibles and books that will be subject to a higher level of consultation.

Unified printing systems

"Our printing machines are the same worldwide. In the past we used to look for local suppliers of paper, but then searched global suppliers to reduce costs for the publications, and actually we are today 80-90% unified in paper purchasing. We generally work with a specific type of paper for a particular publication. For example from UPM we use Satin 72 g/m², and 54 g/m² for some specific publications. The paper comes from UPM Stracel paper mill. At the moment UPM sends this paper to 11 of our branches in Europe," Comodi notes.

Centralizing and standardizing purchasing and production have also taken place among the Jehovah's Witnesses. "In this way we simplify the operations, reducing preparation time, increasing production and quality, and reducing costs. We are not a commercial organization but supported by private donations. Most of the work is done by volunteers, who neither expect nor desire financial return for their services. We recognize that UPM sees that in us and the uniqueness

makes the negotiations very congenial and approachable," Andreotti says.

"As with UPM, we always hope to find partners who produce and sell paper being serious, flexible and reliable."

He says that UPM and the printers in Italy have found a common ground and co-operation regarding stabilizing the paper to function well in the printing machines. At the moment, the extranet services offer more detailed information about paper production. A quick contact in case of problems also helps to avoid any misunderstanding.

"In the future, the research of new technology for the preservation of the environment and of the production costs will be a fundamental point in this co-operation. The continuous increase of energy prices is a particular challenge," Andreotti notes.

Printing houses in 18 countries

Comodi points out that they have technicians with notable experience in every branch in the printing department. On a global level, there is a group of experts co-ordinating the various problems of paper quality. The Technical Group regularly exchanges information about tests of new paper types. They communicate about printing problems with the paper plants, and also take into consideration the logistical shipping and delivery problems to find the best solutions for specific requirements.

"When for example the branch in South Africa started a new press, we sent people from the German and Italian plants to assist them in teaching and training on the new equipment. Thus, they are now self-sufficient," Comodi says.

At the moment the Jehovah's Witnesses print publications in 18 countries, including the US, Canada and Mexico in North America; Argentina, Brazil and Colombia in South America; the UK, Finland, Germany, Italy and Spain in Europe; Nigeria and South Africa in Africa; India, Japan, Korea and the Philippines in Asia; as well as Australia.

The Jehovah's Witnesses are also self-sufficient in distribution. Once the order is received, the program starts for printing, binding and shipping the publications. If not shipped by courier, the distribution takes place using their own trucks. Each member of the community receives the publications that are needed.



Giuseppe Comodi (left) and Gianfranco Andreotti (right).

Watchtower magazine has a print-run of over 27 million copies twice a month in 153 languages.



Dedicated volunteers have notable technical experience and expertise in printing from years of on-site learning and training.

