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## WRITING & EDITING

## COMING TO TERMS WITH

by Bonifacius Atiase

want to affect my generation for the kingdom of God through the ministry of writing. But in the same way the apostle Paul admonished young Timothy, the 'writing potential' in me by the grace of God

A few magazines and books helped to inspire and motivate me to write. I started participating in workshops to develop my writing skills. There I was exhorted to face the challenges that frustrate writers—rejections, criticism, etc. So far, I had not yet come into direct contact with these challenges. I could not fathom the discouraging effect they could have on the writer. I saw no cause for alarm—until I came face to face with corrections to my own manuscripts.

must be stirred up and developed.

The surgery

In July 1994 I entered a writing contest sponsored by Step magazine. I submitted my manuscript before the August closing date. When the results were published in December, I had won the second prize in the feature article category and received a set of books, a certificate and some cash.

A couple of months later, for the very first time, I saw my article published. I felt a deep sense of fulfillment. However, the 12-page, double-spaced manuscript had not only been drastically reduced to about one-third of the original size, and retitled, but had also been practically rewritten to suit the publication. A major surgery had taken place at the editor's desk. The changes seemed completely arbitrary. "Surely," I reasoned, "every editor has unlimited power."

## The bleeding scripts

On another ocassion, I contacted a local program producer and submitted a few portions from a book I had been writing for consideration as radio scripts. The following week, I asked the producer/editor if the scripts had been accepted and approved for presentation. And then I saw them!

The scripts had sustained severe lacerations (or rather, deep cuts) inflicted by the editor's sharp, two-

edged pen and were crying out for immediate first-aid, which they duly received later. The sight of my scripts soaked with "blood" (the red ink of criticism, comments, and corrections) made me sick. The editor gave me some guidelines about the audience, language and tone of the message. He suggested I avoid high-flown words and asked me to re-write. Blood rushed to my head. I was annoyed and disappointed. It seemed to me red ink flowed more profusely from this editor's pen when he was working on my manuscripts in particu-

he was working on my manuscripts in particular. I wanted to forget about writing. I had still not come to appreciate and understand the essential duty of the editor.

A few days later, I reconsidered and decided to go back to the wounded scripts. I took time to objectively consider the editor's remarks. In addition to criticism, I realized he had also written corrections with constructive comments. Before long I could not help agreeing with the editor. I faced the weaknesses of my scripts. I wrote the scripts again and, my goodness, they were excellent.

The knife-edged pen

A surgeon in the operating theatre does not cut through the flesh of a patient in order to kill, but to heal. The editor's red pen works to remove cancerous cells and tumors, to heal and not to kill.

In Ephesians, the apostle Paul refers to the word of God as the sword of the Spirit. In Hebrews, it is described as sharper than any two-edged sword. It is so sharp that when practically and faithfully applied, it cuts down all the sinful strongholds in our lives. An editor's pen also functions along the same line as it cuts out all the unwanted "sins" of the writer's manuscript.❖

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