

# The New Independent Adventist Publishers

by Dave Schwantes

Some Seventh-day Adventists who publish books do not preside over church-owned institutions. They are independent of church structure, although they object to being labeled as dissidents. They are not even completely dissatisfied with denominational publishing policy.

Some even object to being called independent Adventist publishers. "We are a secular, general publishing company," explains Howard Weeks, director of Woodbridge Press, Santa Barbara, Calif. "All that can be said is that the owner happens to be a member of the Adventist church."

Barbra Coffey, executive director of Doubletree Press, College Place, Wash., prefers to use the term adjunct. "We provide adjunct editing services to the church," she comments. "We work with the church as do independent medical institutions."

However, some members of the General Conference Publishing Department apparently do not understand the intent of the independent publishers. To discourage the independents from producing works that might otherwise go to the denomination's

publishers, the Publishing Department's Book Review Committee has established a set of guidelines restricting distribution through church channels.

The guidelines read in part: "If the author chooses to use printers or publishers other than one of the three denominational publishing houses, he should not normally expect to use church channels for distribution."

The Publishing Department does not know exactly how many independent Adventist publishers it is dealing with. Operations range in size from the individual who publishes a single book presenting a particular viewpoint to stock-issuing corporations publishing as many as six titles a year.

Largest and most successful of the so-called independents is Woodbridge Press, which recorded sales of nearly \$500,000 last year. Established five years ago by Howard Weeks and his wife, Woodbridge has published 21 titles, with six titles now in production.

Subject matter is not specifically Adventist or denominational. In fact, Woodbridge has published more non-Adventist than Adventist authors.

"We do not publish any book that would depend on the Adventist market for its commercial success," maintains Weeks,

“and we do not publish any book that is religious in character or otherwise directly competitive with the output of denominational publishing houses.”

Woodbridge has exhibited its works at a number of major trade shows including the American Booksellers Association Convention, the American Library Association Convention and the International Book Fair in Frankfurt.

Doubletree Press was established two years ago by Cecil and Barbra Coffey to help fill gaps in denominational publishing related to what they call “the full Adventist way of life.”

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“Church publishing houses cannot be all things to all members,” contends Coffey. “By mandate, they must mainly deal with theology, church polity, missions and religiously oriented materials, with only a scattering of books in other areas.”

Doubletree has published eight titles for the general market. Subject matter includes such topics as country living, nature and health.

Concerned Communications, Arroyo Grande, Calif., did not get into publishing until it had existed for two years as a service agency. It had provided creative design and editing services to a number of denominational clients including Faith for Today, Christian Record Braille Foundation and Loma Linda University.

“Our publishing activities developed out of requests we received from various levels of church activity to provide much-needed materials not currently available from denominational publishing houses,” explains Russ Potter, creative director.

Concerned Communications has published 18 titles in the past two years. “There is no question that Adventists are reading what we produce,” continues Potter, “but we are less concerned with adding to what Adventists have for their own reading than with providing them with materials they can share with others.”

Freedom House, another independent, was organized to operate on a project-by-project basis, rather than as a continuing operation. Among its initial projects was a biography of H. M. S. Richards, Sr. It was filled with fancy graphics and numerous photographs.

“Although there were an initial couple of projects that had unique interest for an Adventist audience,” says Warren Johns, now an attorney for the General Conference in Washington, D.C., “Freedom House could not be presently characterized as an Adventist publisher.”

Although many of the independents have distributed their books through Adventist Book Centers, they rely on other means of distribution, too.

Woodbridge has representatives who call on bookstores and book distributors throughout the United States. Woodbridge has also established marketing channels in Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and India.

Doubletree has placed its books in a number of college bookstores and health food stores. Concerned Communications uses medical and educational institutions, health educators and religious organizations to distribute its works.

Gaining approval from the General Conference Publishing Department’s Book Review Committee for advertising in denominational publications and distribution through Adventist Book Centers can be a lengthy process.

In evaluating books, the committee asks whether there is a need for such a book within the denomination, whether it is in harmony with Adventist doctrines, whether the book manuscript was first submitted to a denominational publishing house and whether the author’s personal life is above reproach.

Recently, it took the committee 18 months to approve one of Doubletree's works, *The Unsweetened Truth About Sugar*. The committee apparently lost the first copies of the book submitted to it and then postponed action twice until Doubletree could provide "further information concerning the operations and relationship of the publisher to our publishing policies." The committee finally approved the book last September.

"The whole procedure," contends Cecil Coffey, "needs overhauling. Undue delays seem to be directed only to Seventh-day Adventists who are in private publishing; other publishers whose works are being considered for approved ABC sales don't seem to get such suspicious treatment."

Russ Potter feels that there may be some in the denomination's publishing structure who

are somewhat threatened by what they see as competition on what they have viewed as "their turf."

"But our marketing methods and the character of the items we produce make it difficult to initiate problems for us," explains Potter. "It is difficult for the structure to openly or effectively exert much pressure on the ABC managers when people are asking for our productions."

In any event, independent Adventist publishers believe they will continue to operate with or without the cooperation of the denomination's publishing organization. As Howard Weeks says, "Dependency or independence in relation to denominational publishing should be no more a question than it would be if I were operating Woodbridge Furniture Company."