

Book Burning in New Guinea

Folk came to the General Conference Session in Indianapolis from all over the world. Here was an opportunity to meet with their leaders and share their needs.

Before leaving home, and as they journeyed to America, at least one group prayed that, at Indianapolis, they would somehow find someone who could send them the books their people so much needed.

At the Session, missionaries from New Guinea met American believers who inquired regarding their needs. These believers from a faraway Pacific island told of the desperate plight of our people there. Unable to afford Spirit of Prophecy books at the Papua Adventist Book Center, they were unable to read those precious books for themselves, nor could they share them with those not of our faith.

What were they to do? The language barrier was not the problem. They could read English, but they could not afford the books in English. They were unable to purchase books, either for their own study libraries or to share with non-Adventists.

When these American believers heard this, upon returning home, they immediately placed an order with an independent ministry for thirty boxes, containing an equal amount of *Desire of Ages*, *Ministry of Healing*, and *Great Controversy*, to be shipped to their newfound friends in New Guinea.

Why did they purchase from an independent ministry? Because they could not afford to obtain thirty boxfuls of high-priced Spirit of Prophecy books from American ABCs.

Oh, how happy were those New Guinea nationals that they had providentially met those folk at the Session in Indianapolis! How cheered were the hearts of the Americans that they could be used of God to answer the prayers of hundreds of believers across the Pacific!

As you might expect, the cost of shipping was quite high; yet, it was a sacrifice willingly made so others

could have those special books, deepen their experience as they read them, and share them with still others.

Thirty boxfuls of three Spirit of Prophecy book titles (about ten boxes of each) was a lot of books, and would help many to come to a deeper knowledge of God—how to serve Him better, how to maintain better health, and understand the issues and events in the final crisis so soon to break in America and quickly spread to all parts of the world.

You can imagine their feelings, when the believers in New Guinea received word that, yes, the promised books were indeed on their way! It would be a slow trip across the Pacific by boat, and soon they would have them.

But the boxfuls did not come. The months passed, and the believers wondered what could have happened.

Then friends at Papua New Guinea Union Mission office, in Papua New Guinea, leaked word.

Church leaders had burned the boxfuls of Spirit of Prophecy books, so the believers could not have them.

Meanwhile, letters were coming from their friends in America. Have you received the books yet?

How would you answer such letters? All they could do was tell the truth, and with tear-filled eyes they did so.

The leaders had destroyed the boxes of *Desire of Ages*, *Ministry of Healing*, and *Great Controversy*, because they thought the books might contaminate the church members. Perhaps they also thought the books might contaminate non-Adventists who might receive them.

I can assure you, there was much weeping. But there is more than weeping going on. Angels were also keeping records.

The problem had been that the leaders did not want the people to have those books, yet the members, not realizing this, had asked that the books be sent to them through the mission office (P.O. Box 86, Lae,

Papua New Guinea). That had been their mistake.

The news of this book burning was shared among several believers in North America, and they wrote the General Conference. One elderly lady asked for an apology and refund, or she would make the matter public.

Would you say that it is wrong when, after stealing and burning private property, that the perpetrators be asked to pay for what was taken and destroyed?

Enclosed in this present report is the reply from General Conference headquarters, in Silver Spring, Maryland.

The author of that reply is Athal Tolhurst, former secretary of the South Pacific (Australasian) Division in Australia. As you will recall, from historical studies we have earlier published, the leadership of the Australasian (now South Pacific) Division consists of whole-hearted believers in the Desmond Ford apostasy.

So, in Tolhurst's letter, we find, he calls, "another perspective on the matter"; the Wahroonga perspective. It is well-known that the South Pacific Division office is determined to keep *Great Controversy* from being circulated. It is also known that they are opposed to Ellen White's other writings. With this background, we can better understand why Athal Tolhurst, now an undersecretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, should defend the burning of *Desire of Ages*, *Ministry of Healing*, and *Great Controversy*.

In his letter, Tolhurst never apologizes for the destruction of the books, but instead gives three reasons why it was a good thing that they were burned:

(1) It was a wise thing to destroy those copies of *Desire of Ages*, *Ministry of Healing*, and *Great Controversy*, because they contained ads for other books. The present writer personally inquired of an elderly lady, who paid for part of those books to be sent to the believers in New

Guinea, what ads were in the back of those books? She said that they were ads for other Spirit of Prophecy books.

(2) Tolhurst gave, as a second reason why it was a worthwhile thing to burn those thirty boxfuls of Spirit of Prophecy books, the fact that the mission-owned ABC store in Papua has some Spirit of Prophecy books for sale.

Burn boxfuls Spirit of Prophecy books, so the believers will have to come to the ABC to buy those same books? That is quite a sales device. In America, it would be called theft and destruction of personal property, and would bring a court and prison sentence.

But wait a minute! Why would the believers from New Guinea be pleading at Indianapolis for Spirit of Prophecy books, if they were easily available at the ABC in Papua? The answer is simple enough: The faithful believers in New Guinea cannot afford to buy those high-priced books at the Adventist Book Center in Papua.

Well, that sheds a different light on the matter. In view of that, why is church leadership so intent on keeping the members in New Guinea from obtaining, reading, or sharing the truths in the Spirit of Prophecy?

The reason Fordite leaders, in their sermons, are so adept at quoting Evangelicals, Catholics, and philosophers—is because they want to point the people away from those books to something else, anything else.

When the Spirit of Prophecy writings are read, the believers learn so very much. They learn true doctrine, high standards, and healthful dietetic principles. They learn what should and what should not be done in our church. Unfortunately, there are those in our ranks who do not want the believers to have such information.

Athal Tolhurst, undersecretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, in Silver Spring, Maryland—our world headquarters—excuses the destruction of about 1,000 Spirit of Prophecy books, with the comment:

“I have been told it was out of

pastoral concern for the sheep of the fold that the shepherds, in Papua New Guinea, decided to destroy the books.”

Look up the words “shepherds” and “sheep” in a concordance, and see what you discover. Ours is not the first time in history that God’s people have had false shepherds over them.

Having given “another perspective” of this theft and destruction of books sent for the believers in New Guinea to read and share with others, Tolhurst dares to claim with fullest assurance: “There is no desire on the part of the church leaders, in Papua New Guinea, to withhold from our members the precious messages that have come to us through Ellen G. White.”

That sentence leaves us breathless. We have here not only the abetting of a crime, but a lying report as well. It was clearly the intent of church leaders in Papua New Guinea to withhold the Spirit of Prophecy from the believers there! Those people, at Indianapolis, pled for books to be sent to them. I personally spoke with the elderly lady who sacrificially paid part of the money for those books to be sent to the believers in that faraway island. But the precious books were intercepted and burned.

The New Guinea believers asked for the books because (1) they did not have them and (2) could not afford to buy them at the Papua book store.

There is no desire on the part of the church leaders, in Papua New Guinea, to withhold from our members the precious messages that have come to us through Ellen G. White.

Out of pastoral concern for the sheep of the fold that the fold, the shepherds, in Papua New Guinea, decided to destroy the books.

If I stole books intended for you, and blithely told you it was alright for me to do this—because there are bookstores where you can buy more, what would you think?

“Let me assure you that we have Adventist Book Centers, in Papua New Guinea, through which our members are able to obtain the Spirit of Prophecy books.”

First, the believers are not financially able to obtain the books there.. Second, even if they were, that would not excuse the theft and destruction of their property.

But there is a third excuse:

“The cases of books were delivered to the mission office.”

This final excuse says too much: (1) You dare not send anything to Adventist believers through their leaders. (2) They cannot be trusted to send it on. It is begging the question to suggest that Papua leadership did not know the books were intended to be handed out to the church members to keep and share.

Athal’s first and third excuses do not jibe. *The first*: We could not give the books to the people, because we dared not let them have them. *The third*: We did give the books to the people, because we did not know they were supposed to go to the people.

In other words, when we leaders have extra Spirit of Prophecy books on our hands, we are as likely to burn them as not, since we do not know what to do with such things. What a terrible admission! “The mission did not tamper with anything that was addressed to other people.” That is, it only destroys that which is not printed on the shipping label as being sent directly to the believers’ own names.

Finally, the undersecretary of the General Conference pens his final paragraph. In light of his defense of the illegal seizure and destruction of over a thousand Spirit of Prophecy books by church leaders, what are we to make of it? What is this “truth” which Athal wants speeded to every land? Surely, it is not Spirit of Prophecy truth.

We have heard of several other Spirit of Prophecy book burning incidents. If enough of our people hear of this, and then pray and plead with our leaders, perhaps they will take a strong stand and stop this practice—instead of excusing it.

This is a serious matter and should not be tolerated. The Spirit of Prophecy is too important in our lives to be burned.

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